WESTERN ADVENTURE AND SPORT STORIES

20c
IN CANADA 25c

Ace-High Magazine

CABALLERO CARDIGAN

A Fighting Waddy Backfires a Blaze of Range War in a Complete Western Novel By

NELS LEROY JORGENSEN

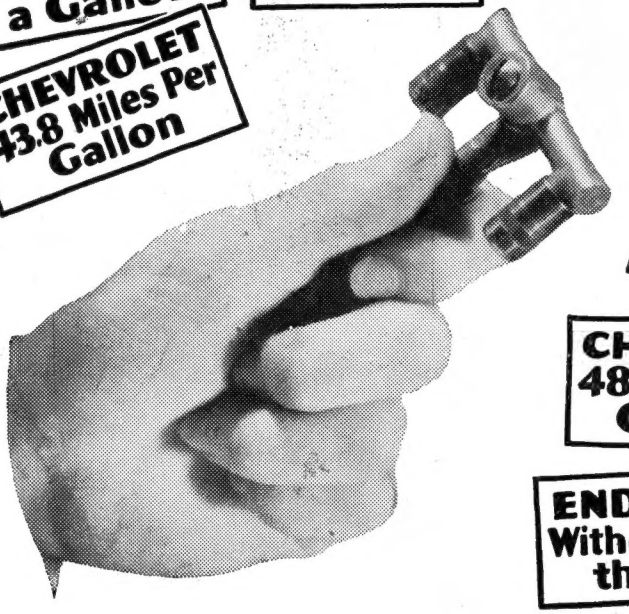
Second December Numb

FORD
57 Miles on a Gallon

BUICK
36 Miles on a Gallon

OLDSMOBILE
1300 Miles of Free Gasoline

CHEVROLET
43.8 Miles Per Gallon



STUDEBAKER
32 Miles on Gallon

SAVED $340
in Gasoline

CHRYSLER
48 Miles Per Gallon

ENDS CARBON
Without Touching the Engine

Who Else Wants to Save Gasoline?

FORD

"I have used one on my Ford for over five years and have traveled over 35,000 miles. Never had any spark plug trouble. Have averaged 28 to 30 miles on a gallon."

J. H. Alruth, Iowa.

CHEVROLET

"You people claim a saving of 25% to 50%. I found I was obtaining 43.8 miles to a gallon on a Chevrolet, whereas formerly I had been getting only 19.5. Actual test surpasses your claim."

M. E. Miller, Kansas City.

BUICK

G. M. Rathburn, Charleston, W. Va., has a Buick Six. Having an old engine, it was getting only 8 or 9 miles to a gal. On a 287-mile trip he got 19 miles to a gal. He says it has saved him $40.00 on one trip.

NASH

"I had a large Nash Six. I drove from Los Angeles to San Francisco on 20 gals. of gas, whereas I have usually taken from 50 to 55."

H. T. McCallon, Calif.

A SOUTH DAKOTA man has discovered an amazing gas-saving invention now installed on over two million cars of every make. Already over ten thousand car owners say it increases gas mileage 25% to 50% . . . cleans out carbon without touching the engine . . . adds more speed and power . . . and saves an astonishing amount of money in gasoline and repair expense. There is a model for every car, truck, tractor or gasoline engine. Anybody can install it in a few minutes.

This invention is based on newly-discovered facts about potential gasoline power that few car owners know about. For example, it is now found that the average man wastes at least 20% to 30% of his gasoline through improper combustion. And many more interesting discoveries, too detailed to mention here.

Read on the left what other car owners say about it. Then accept the inventor's special introductory offer. He will send you samples to test without obligation to buy. If you find it doesn't do for you what it has done for other car owners, he will pay a cash forfeit for the few minutes you've spent in testing it. Don't send a penny now. Simply send your name in coupon below.

J. A. Stransky Mfg. Co., W-350, Stransky Block, Pukwana, S. D.

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Herrick made $157 in a day, letting Stransky Vaporizers sell themselves. Territories open everywhere. Full or spare time. Check coupon below.

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W-350, Stransky Block, Pukwana, S. D.

Yes, send me full description of this new way to save gasoline. This request does not obligate me in any way.

My name is.....

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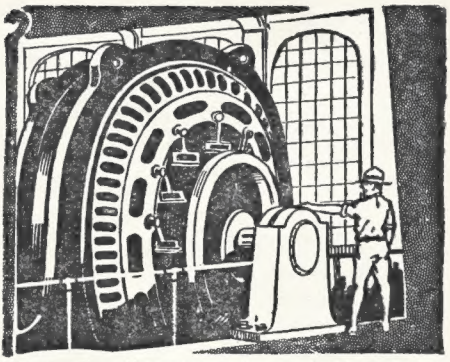
City .....State .....

( ) Check here if you want agent's proposition.

You Fellows Who Want BIG PAY Get into ELECTRICITY



WHY earn $15 or $20 or $30 a week, when in the same six days as an Electrical Expert, you can make $70 to $200 — and do it easier — not work half so hard. Why, then, remain in a small-pay, no-future job that offers no chance for big promotion — no chance for big income? Fit yourself for a real job. **Get into Electricity.** That's where the big money is being made, and always will be made.

$30 A DAY
Dear Mr. Cooke: I was making $25 a week when I enrolled. Now with my own Electrical Shop I make as high as $30 a day. A. J. Daigneault, 225 Worcester, Southbridge, Mass.

$1.50 AN HOUR
Dear Mr. Cooke: I had to work like a slave for 45c an hour before I enrolled. Now, thanks to you, Mr. Cooke, I make $1.50 an hour. G. W. Oprea, 4220 N. Meade Av. Chicago, Ill.

Electricity — The Big Pay Field

Today even the ordinary Electrician — the "screw driver" kind—is making money—big money. But it's the trained man—the Electrical Expert,—who makes the really big money, — $12 to $30 a day — $70 to $200 a week. Be a Big-Pay man, yourself. Get in line, **now, for one of these "Big-Pay" Jobs.**

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I'll train you at home, — in your spare time. You work just as you are working now—at your same job. My now famous "Work-Sheet and Job-Ticket" method, guarantees you simplified, practical training along work-shop lines. In a few short months you can step out of your old job into a new job—into electrical work where you can be a Big-Pay man in this Big-Pay field.

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To learn Electricity my way you don't have to be a College man, or even a High School graduate. You can read. You can write. That's enough. With me, you get experience as you go along and make good money while learning. I'll show you how, — and I'll give you, without extra cost tools and apparatus to work with—6 Big Outfits in all.

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That's what I agree to do. And back of me in this agreement stands the Chicago Engineering Works, a $2,000,000 Illinois Corporation. There's nothing like "Cooke" Training, anywhere. It's the Training that big Electrical men are praising; it's the Training that employers recommend; it's the Training that one of our greatest Engineering societies, has endorsed 100 percent. **It's the Training for you.**

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So Can You

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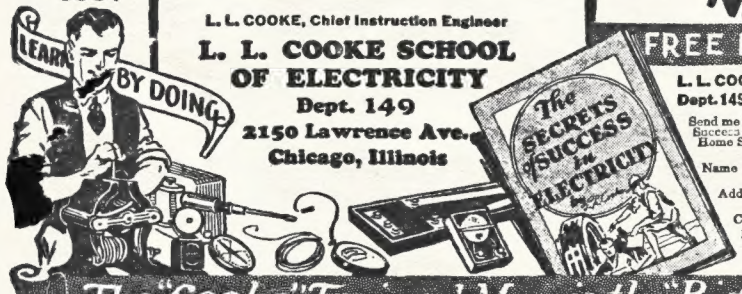
I'll train you at home in a few short months. L. L. COOKE

6 BIG OUTFITS NO EXTRA COST



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Vol. XLV SECOND DECEMBER NUMBER **No. 4**

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A Complete Novel

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Into San Miguel with his ready six-guns rides the steel-nerved son of a Border exile.

Short Stories

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A frontier sheriff lays the ghost of a ghost-town.

GRIM ACCOUNTING ..... Glenn A. Connor 538
Clay Banks closes out an account—with fire.

THE LUCKY SEVENTH ..... Joseph B. Fox 547
The Kid plays his favorite number.

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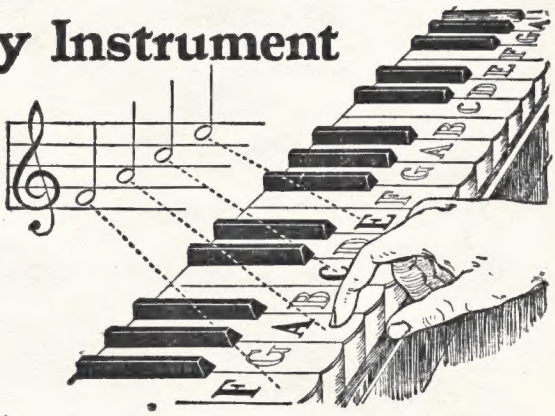

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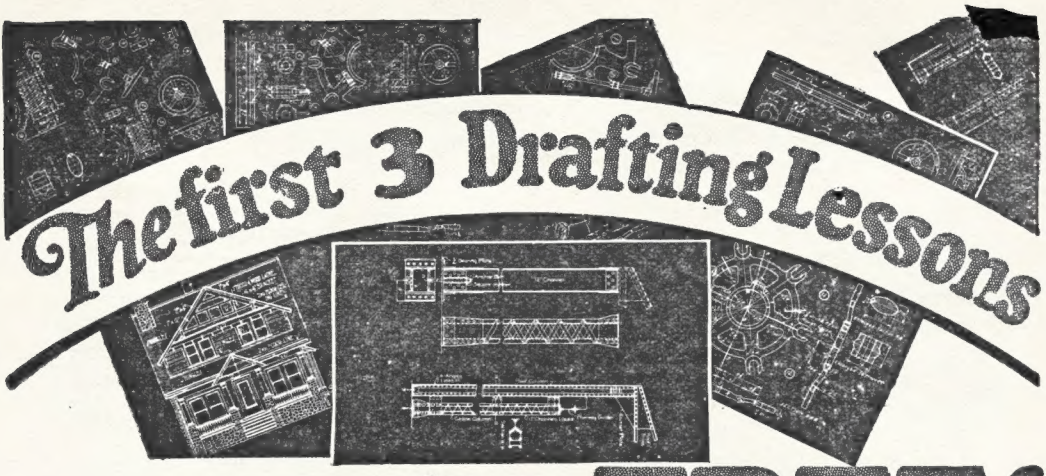

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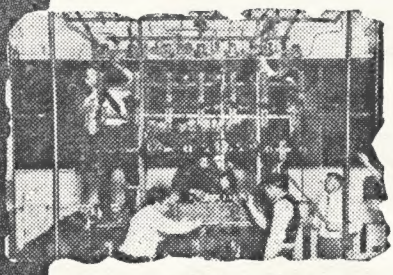

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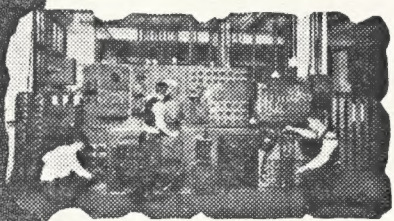

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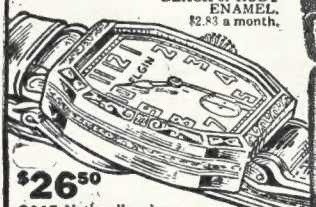

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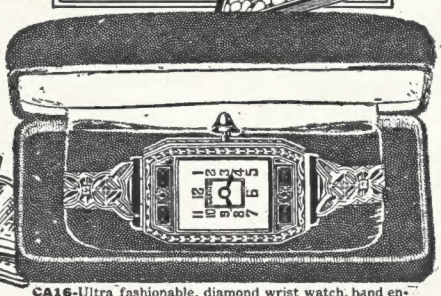

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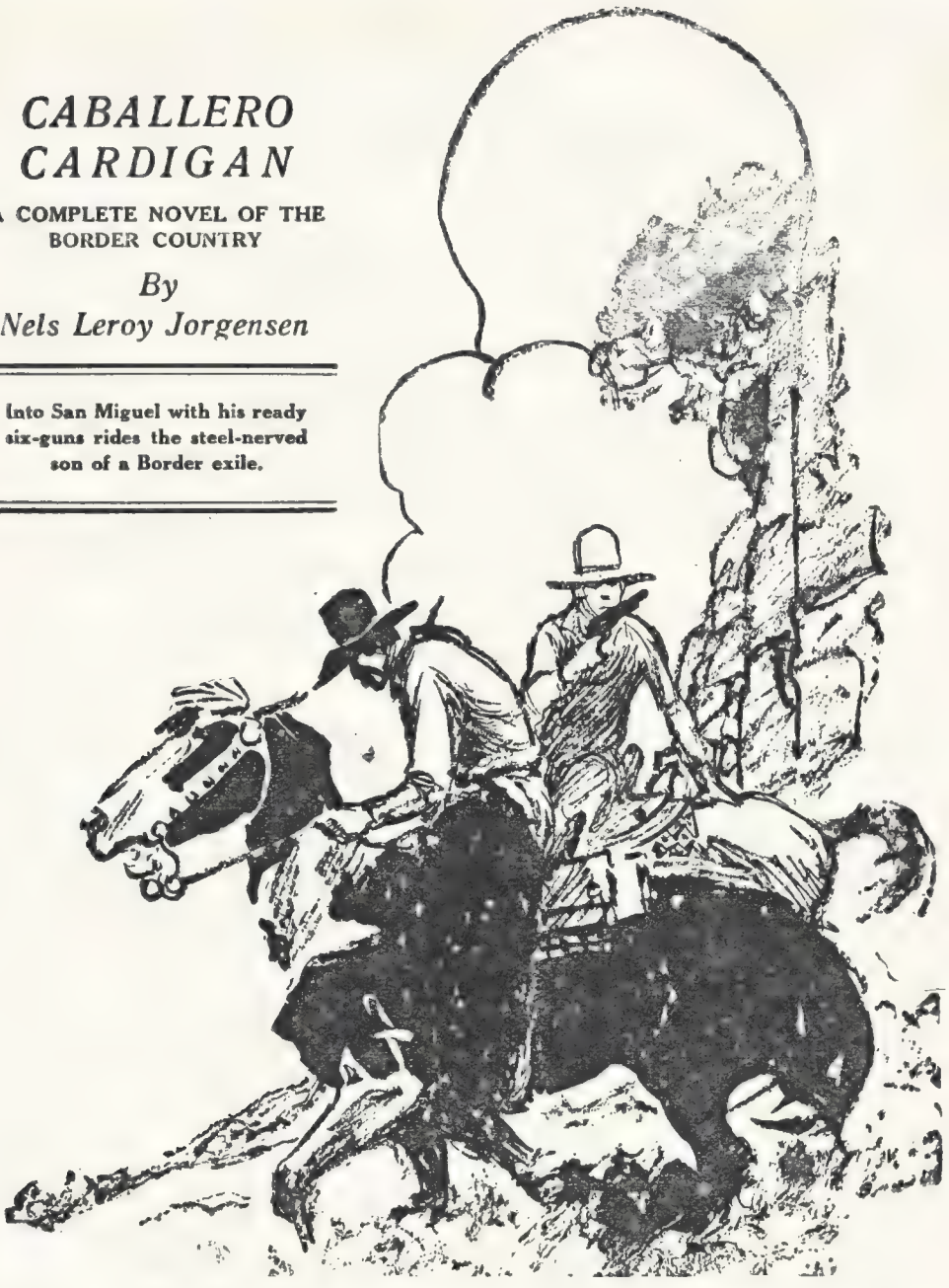
CABALLERO CARDIGAN

A COMPLETE NOVEL OF THE BORDER COUNTRY

By
Nels Leroy Jorgensen

Into San Miguel with his ready six-guns rides the steel-nerved son of a Border exile.



CHAPTER I

AMERICANO!

CARDIGAN heard two shots. But no whine of rifle bullets had preceded them.

"Who is being shot at?" he demanded of the loneliness all about him.

He reined in quickly. The black mustang under him pawed with his forefeet apprehensively. To the horse that knew its rider so well, those shots meant action. Yet Cardigan hesitated, his narrowed eyes fixed upon the terrain ahead of him.

He was placed well in the open. A fair marksman within range could easily have hit him. But ahead, the open of the arid

desert country was broken by a depression of land where grew thick groves of cocopalms and underbrush. The trail he was following led through there.

He frowned angrily. This was his country—the part of Mexico over which his word was pretty close to law. It was lawless enough, as he had reason to know; but Cardigan had the lawlessness under some control.

"Let's see, Diablo!"

Only lightly he pressed his spurs. The black leapt forward eagerly, tore for the dark spot ahead. Sunset was spreading a soft glow over the open country, and the palms seemed wreathed in a greenish-gray mist that loomed out of the desert.

Even as he started, though, other shots came—a wild yell. Cardigan leaned forward and rode.

That he was riding into possible danger was of no thought to him. He doubted that there was anyone in this country who could be of menace to him. The black, envy of every horse lover who saw him, ran with the long strides of a racer, tore eagerly for the sound of bullets and violence.

The trail swerved sharply into the trees. It was shadowed here, cool—a long avenue between tall trees that opened out in spots and gave into gold-banded aisles and shallow hollows. Cardigan kept on, until he suddenly drew rein with an abrupt exclamation.

A single rider was tearing toward him, bent low in the saddle. Horse and man emerged for an instant in one of those open spaces; Cardigan saw the man's arm swing round and caught the flash of a pistol's bark. Then through the trees came again that wild yell—Cardigan knew it well.

The pack was hunting an enemy on its own soil!

One man! Cardigan caught his reins and waited. The rider turned his head forward after the shot. He was bearing down fast. Bullets kicked up dust about his horse's feet. His gun came up sharply.

Cardigan raised his hand in the Indian sign of peace. The gun hand hesitated. But Cardigan was evidently without weapons; his two guns reposed innocently in their sheaths. He turned the black's head so that he was facing in the same direction as the fugitive.

"Hold that!" he cried out sharply, in English.

The rider came on. As he was almost abreast, Cardigan struck in his spurs again. He caught a glimpse of a grizzled, worn face that yet showed no sign of fear or trepidation, of a bulldog jaw and cold, glittering eyes under shaggy brows that were almost white. Cardigan was suddenly riding along beside the stranger.

"Americano?" he yelled.

"Plenty!" was the answer, labored. "If yo're—"

"Never mind talkin'. Trail me, and I'll get you out. I know the hombres chasin' you—!"

They were both at a fast gallop now. Behind them shots still echoed.

"How do I know — ?" began the stranger from across the Border.

"You don't!" Cardigan ground out between his teeth. "Unless you remember that I could've dropped you along the trail and potted you as you came along, if I'd wanted to. Come on—ride! That's Contreras' gang in there."

The reply, his manner—his cool detachment and his evident knowledge of both situation and country, appeared to reassure the fugitive. With a single glance at Cardigan's keen, hawklike profile, he turned his attention to the trail.

Three more shots—bunched. Cardigan swore and turned to look over his shoulder. The pursuit was emerging from among the trees—half a dozen horsemen with rifles, riding from different points, concentrating on the opening of the trail. They rode hard; there were vengeance and death in their stride. Cardigan had regained the open now.

"They'll pay for that, the *jibaros!*" he ground out.

His companion looked at him and nodded grimly. A shadow of pain twisted the Northerner's face for an instant, but it was gone immediately.

Cardigan pointed across the other's saddle horn.

"We go that way," he commanded. "They can't cut us off through that gully; they've got to follow straight, and our direction is back where you came from."

The other hesitated. "If yo're leadin' me—" he began suspiciously.

Cardigan's dark eyes blazed furiously. "Take it or leave it!" he returned. "If you think you're any better off here, then keep on. If you don't—follow me!"

Viciously he swerved the black about, and tore for the gully opening. There was no time for hesitation. With a hoarse oath, the other man swerved also and swung after him. A yell went up from their pursuers. Cardigan turned a grim backward look; and as his man caught up, swung round to send two shots at the others.

For an instant the pursuit brought up. Then it came charging on again, recognizing Cardigan's tactics but not yet certain of his ultimate intent.

The floor of the gully was rough and uneven. It bore no sign of a trail. Two shoulders of ground, studded with some scrub mesquite and greasewood—that was all. Side by side, the two animals pounded their way through, amid the gathering shadows. In less than a minute, their pursuers had entered the gully and were charging after them. Another shot—and the whine of it sang by Cardigan's ear.

His face was grim and frozen and it wore an icy smile. Perhaps the man he was succoring knew, too—but at least Cardigan knew well who these pursuers were. Men who respected and feared him; and yet men who might be glad to see him out of the way. He wondered if, in the heat of pursuit, they had recognized the black mane and coat of the famous Diablo.

The horse lengthened its stride at the sound of the whining lead. He knew that sound. Cardigan had to check him slightly in order not to outrun his companion.

They emerged from the gully with the pursuit hot on their heels. It was closing up. The American's horse was winded and showing it. Cardigan frowned.

Ahead of him, through the enclosing gloom, he caught two faint lights, close together, and the bulk of a large house and outbuildings that loomed against the gray of the hillside behind it. He pointed.

"If we can make there," he said, "we're safe."

His companion grunted. They rode.

The promised shelter loomed closer; but there was little sign of life about it. Startling to the lone fugitive of a moment before were the exultant yells that went up from the Mexicans who saw their course. He glanced again sharply at Cardigan, opened his lips to speak—and then closed them, only gripping his gun butt more grimly in his free hand.

Cardigan led the way grimly forward. The trail he struck wound upward, past deserted bunkhouses and a corral where some dozen horses raised inquiring heads at the galloping hoofs that swept by them. Another yell, fully as exultant, from the men behind. Cardigan swung up before the board steps of a huge and handsome ranch house, and turned for only one look over his shoulder.

"Inside—fast!" he commanded his companion.

He dropped lightly from the saddle, a slim, powerful young figure in the fading light, and gave the black a slap across the flank which sent him trotting off rearward.

The other man tried to swing a leg free—groaned. Instantly Cardigan was at his side.

"Quick!" he ordered. "Drop off. I'll get you in."

The fugitive obeyed. The pursuing riders, yelling wildly, were charging up from the trail below now. Cardigan felt the iron-muscled body of a man past middle age fall into his outstretched arms. A groan was bit off as the man's right foot touched the ground.

Then Cardigan had gathered the grizzled form into his arms as easily as he would have carried a child; and he was striding up the steps and across the vacant porch into the dark house.

A Chinese cook bearing a lantern appeared from the interior, jabbering excitedly. Cardigan cut him off.

"*Seguida!*" he commanded. "Quick! Bring the sofa over to the window there,

Yang—and bolt this door. Make it fast!"

Without comment, the Oriental leapt to obey. The door slammed shut and a bolt fell into place. The sofa was shoved through the gloom of the room to the left of the hallway. Cardigan deposited his burden and glanced through the window.

"You can still shoot, I guess, eh?" he asked coolly. "That's why I'm leaving you here. You might have to do some shooting through the window."

"I can do it—plenty!" was the grim retort. Keen admiration gleamed in the fearless old eyes as Cardigan whirled and darted through the doorway. There was a lithe, pantherish grace about his movements which made him seem to do everything completely without effort. It was as though his whole slim body was simply a perfectly oiled and working machine; noiseless and swift as an Indian, and yet vibrant with some hidden strength.

"Get yourself a gun, Yang!" came the crisp command. "Everybody gone?"

"They come back—plonto," grinned the Chinaman. "Here is gun. You, too?"

"No, I've got my forty-fours." Cardigan touched the two weapons swinging from his hips. I'm going out. Stay back of me and be ready."

The riders had swung up in a milling crowd before the entrance to the house. They hesitated there, a little fearful, more than a little puzzled. A single shot cracked out, an oath accompanying it, and buried itself in the paneling of the big door.

Cardigan caught the door knob and swung it open. An instant more and he stood framed in it, dominating the six men from the height. His hands touched his hips lightly; he looked completely unafraid.

"What do you want here?" he demanded. "You, Manuel—I know you! Where is your chief?"

"We want that man inside there," came in a surly grunt. "That *you* should save him, Caballero—"

"Is my affair," Cardigan cut in. "And now, I will talk to your *jefe*—not to you; *sabe usted?* Get away from here, and get away fast, or you'll pay for it. I promise you!"

"You will not give him to us?" spoke up a menacing voice out of the dark. There was a low growl.

"You heard me. *Vaya se—pronto!*"

"*Carajo!* You damned gringo—!"

The shot that followed the word showed all the hate that they bore this man—whom still they feared. But the shot was enough. Someone had defied Cardigan. These men were aroused to the killing mood, and he had cheated them of their prey. Besides, they hated him, and he was alone. Now was the time!

"Kill 'im!" someone shouted. "*Muerte* for the gringo Cardigan!"

With the speed of a panther, Cardigan slid inside the door. But not before Yang's single shot had barked out and stabbed at the jet of flame which had come from one of the riders. A man gave a howl of agony, and a figure pitched headlong from the saddle.

"Nice work, Yang," Cardigan said coolly, and he dropped the bolts into place.

He swung open a little loophole beside the heavy door frame, whipped a gun from his holster, and fired. Another yell of agony greeted him; then the remainder of the riders broke up in confusion and took to shelter. Their horses went trotting about helplessly.

A shot came from the adjoining room. Cardigan looked inside in time to see the smoke curling from the muzzle of his guest's forty-five. From the rear of the house, a moment later, there were two shots. Cardigan frowned.

"Better get into the kitchen, Yang—everything locked?"

"All locked. But the windows—" Yang went hurrying off, trailing his Winchester.

Cardigan turned his attention to the front door. There was little to be seen, though. From the fragments of yells and curses that came to his ears from outside, he assured himself with some surprise that these men of Contreras' were going to stick to their ground.

He shrugged. There were only four of them left, he reasoned. Four of them—he had faced more than that, alone. But he did not like being holed up like

this. His dark eyes flashed. They had got extra courage from somewhere, these swine. To attack Caballero Cardigan himself in his own house. . .!

A shot whistled unheeded across the open, pinged through the window glass and buried itself in the ceiling. Cardigan turned with a puzzled frown to look at his guest. They must certainly want this man badly, to dare to attack the Puesta del Sol Rancho.

Suddenly there were other yells, from farther off: a volley of shots that came from several six-guns, all at once. There followed the gallop of hoofbeats and a swirl of men rode up before the ranch house steps. Off at the sides there were other yells, and horses were galloping off.

"Señor! Señor Cardigan! Is it all well?"

Cardigan laughed; and striding to the door, flung it open. "All well, Lobo. *Entra!* Have you chased off those swine?"

A small Mexican, wiry as a cat, fierce of eye and with a blackguard expression, a knife cut across his left cheek from cheekbone to chin, dismounted and swung across the veranda. Lobo Garcia looked what he was, a dangerous man. Two heavy and highly ornamented guns in silver-studded holsters swung at his short, thin thighs.

"I chased off what I found. There is a dead man out there, and one who is wounded, that I have taken. We heard the shooting as we were riding back. But they are Contreras' men!" the Mexican exclaimed with astonishment in his voice.

"Nobody else!" Yang had affixed a lantern in the hallway, and Garcia halted there. Cardigan was absently reloading his guns. "Contreras' men," he repeated. "And they'd have got me if they could. Have them bring in the wounded man; I want to talk to him. The *vaqueros* better eat. I don't think there'll be any more trouble to-night."

He turned carelessly away. Garcia went outside and gave abrupt orders. The men who had come with him on horseback turned obediently and drifted down toward the bunkhouses.

Cardigan halted in the doorway of the room where he had left his guest. Momentarily, in the arrival of Lobo and his cowboys, he had forgotten this man. Now, in the light that streamed out from the hall and across the room, he found himself brought up suddenly by a look of utter hostility gleaming in those dangerous eyes under their shaggy brows. The man, propped up against the back of the sofa and the wall, transfixed him with an intent look of blazing enmity.

Cardigan halted, momentarily at a loss. For an instant neither spoke. Then the stranger's lips parted.

"Cardigan," he said steadily, "That's you. Are you—Caballero Cardigan?"

Cardigan frowned a little. Already he could sense what was coming.

"That's what the Mexicans call me," he said softly.

He saw the gleam of his guest's yellowed teeth. "Then—I'd sooner be in hell than've let you save me! Sabe that? If it's a choice between killers—maybe those others wouldn't 've been no worse. Pull up yore gun—I can't shoot yuh down without it!"

CHAPTER II

Caballero Decides

CARDIGAN stood quite motionless. He made no movement to obey the snarled command. There was in his manner no trace of fear. There was even a cool, collected dignity about him that had its effect. He shook his head slowly, while the wounded man's finger trembled on his trigger.

"What's the use?" he said calmly. "It doesn't need to matter to you who I am. I told you I'd save you and I have. You can go now—any time you want to."

"And I'm supposed to believe that? Come through, Cardigan—what do yuh want of me? When I know, I warn yuh that I'll shoot it out with you and yore whole pack before yuh get me."

Cardigan smiled a little. "What could I want of you?" he returned, a trifle contemptuously. "I don't even know who you are."

That seemed to appease the other a bit.

It was plain sense. The pistol muzzle lowered a trifle.

"I'm Stevens. Joe Stevens, owner of the Circle S, outa San Miguel, across the line. I reckon yuh know the country all right. Me and my foreman come down here trailin' cows that yore pals run off. They got Slim, and they was gettin' me. I reckon anybody by the name o' Cardigan knows what I mean."

"What pals of mine?" Cardigan asked calmly.

"Contreras and his outfit."

Cardigan smiled. "Wasn't that Contreras' outfit that chased us?" he murmured. "Did they look like—pals?"

Stevens grunted. He glowered out of the shadows. There was something confusing to his straight-thinking, untutored mind about this calm, dignified figure before him. Cardigan must be either one thing or another. San Miguel knew him; it had known his father, before Scar Cardigan had made his last raid and crossed the Mexican border never to return, leaving a trail of blood and battle in his wake.

But Caballero Cardigan was somehow, not instantly understandable. He spoke like a man who had read books. He carried two guns, and he could evidently use them. Naturally—being Scar Cardigan's son!

And here he had fought off Contreras' men—and men said he was in league with that rustler and bandit. Contreras' men had tried to kill him, even. Stevens shook his head. Grizzled old fire-eater that he was—hater of rustlers and outlaws—he was confused.

"The name Cardigan's enough," he growled. "Yore name and mine can't ever be friendly; *sabe?* But I'm plumb grateful to yuh, I suppose, anyhow. Yuh did save my life, I reckon. But that's all. If yuh really don't want anything more o' me, I'll make to get away, somehow. I'd hate to tell the boys in San Miguel that I accepted Caballero Cardigan's hospitality."

He started to get up. But Cardigan put out his hand.

"Don't be a fool, Stevens," he said abruptly. "You can't get out of this room on that leg of yours. Sleep out in the corral to-night, if you like. But I'll look at the leg first, and you'll eat afterward. There's plenty of time to get away. It's only eight hours' ride to the Border and San Miguel's not far from that. Where are you hit?"

Stevens growled, but he permitted Cardigan to tear off one leg of his chaps and cut away the high-heeled boot on his right foot. The boot showed the bullet mark; and a moment later, Cardigan discerned that the ball had shattered against the bone just above the old cowman's ankle. But it had not splintered the bone. It had only slid across it and somehow imbedded itself there.

Yang arrived with bandages and hot water. With deft fingers and a sterilized kitchen knife, Cardigan loosed the lead; and in a few moments the wound was dressed.

"Once you're on a horse," Cardigan said, rising, "you'll be able to make it back to San Miguel. Someone ought to go with you, though. It's a long trail."

"I'll make it," Stevens averred stubbornly.

Cardigan smiled a little. There was extreme youth and a young carelessness in his smile that gave his lean, swarthy features an entirely new expression. His eyes were dark, with the slightest touch of an amber green in their depths; this light was a dangerous, deadly flame when he was aroused. But in spite of his air of cool command, his careless assumption that he would be master in any situation, he was yet very young.

Stevens calculated rapidly. He had heard of the marriage of Scar Cardigan years before. It was to a Spanish lady of some family, he remembered, whose father had been Scar Cardigan's friend and who had sheltered him after the States became too hot for his deviltries. That would have been—he looked at the son again—Caballero Cardigan could be no more than twenty-three or four.

"Scar dead?" he asked inadvertently.

Cardigan nodded. "He died right after my mother," he answered softly. There

was a wealth of meaning in the way he said it; even Stevens could glimpse the worship that the outlaw must have had for the one woman he had ever looked upon twice.

There was a space of silence. Garcia entered the room and Cardigan turned to him, throwing off his mood of the moment.

"Where's that wounded hombre?"

"I have talk' to him. We made him talk." Garcia smiled a wolfish little smile. "It is so, what we suspect. Contreras would not punish any of his men who—accidental—kill you."

Cardigan's eyes narrowed swiftly. "I thought so! Contreras is up to plenty—he's aiming high and he'd like to get me out of the way. But he's afraid to face it himself."

He walked slowly to the door. The first anger at Garcia's words had worn off. He stood thoughtfully looking out into the dusk. The short twilight had gone, and hills and valleys were alike wrapped in shadows. A man crossed his line of vision, outlined for a moment against the lights of the bunkhouse.

"Federico!" he called softly.

"*Si*, señor," came back instantly.

"Find Diablo and saddle him for me, *tenga la bondad!*"

"*Si*, señor."

Cardigan's eyes were fixed upon a small roselike patch of light on the farther side of the rich valley. It could not be seen at first glance. Someone there would be fearing for him. He turned as Garcia ranged in the doorway beside him.

"I heard you tell Federico to saddle," the foreman of the *vaqueros* said. "You do not ride alone, *amigo mio.*"

"*Si.* For just a little time, Lobo." Cardigan pointed to the tiny splotch of light. "I only ride to say *adios.* To-morrow I am going north with Stevens."

"Nort'?" the native gasped. "With thes hombre? *Porque*, Caballero?"

Cardigan hesitated. Then he turned and looked into the wicked, dangerous eyes of a man whom he knew loved him well.

"To make a home, Lobo," he said quietly. "I'm going to make a home in my own country. Here is no place for her—nor for any man who wants to be honest and straight. Here I must fight with outlaws for outlaws' spoils, while I want to live decently. And when a man is married—" he shrugged—"it will not do."

Garcia's eyes opened wide. "*Caramba!* So you are to marry the Señorita Dolores! *Es verdad?*"

"*Verdad,*" Cardigan nodded. "But I must first make a place for her and for me. A place among decent men and women—the place my father came from."

"San Miguel? They hate your very name there!"

"They'll like it, before I'm through," Cardigan returned grimly.

Federico drew up, with Diablo restlessly pawing the earth. Cardigan, with a brief word, went down the steps and vaulted into the saddle. He rode off.

He remembered what he had said to Lobo Garcia: "The place my father came from." The place to which his father could never take the bride he loved—back to his own country. His father's sins were many; a steadfast, fierce courage and a loyalty to friends were his chief virtues. But Cardigan remembered that father's dying.

"You haven't got a black mark on yore sheet, son," he said. "Don't make any. They're all afraid of yuh—yuh can sling a gun like a streak o' lightnin' and stand up with any man in anything. Let that be enough. Only—some day there'll be more than yoreself to think of. Keep square with the world for that day. And when it comes, go back to yore own country. Maybe it'll be hard, with the name I've left there for yuh; but yo're man enough to fight yore way through. Square up for me, if yuh can—but stay right for yourself and make yore home where yore home is!"

He had known the bitterness of the outlaw's life then. Never before had he guessed at the canker in Scar Cardigan's bosom. Something in the intensity of those words spoken so shortly before death had impressed him as nothing else could.

And then—when suddenly his eyes opened and he saw the Dolores of his childhood as a young woman—then he knew for himself!

This was not his land, after all. He loved its people and its ways, but it was not his. All his life he had known outlaws and bandits; and his father's iron hand had been enough to make them friends instead of enemies—even though Scar Cardigan had never drawn a gun except in self-defense, after that last chase across the Border.

He drew close to the lights he had seen now, and found himself in the yard of a smaller hacienda than his own. A cozy, adobe-walled house enclosing a neat, flower-bordered patio, loomed out of the soft dark. From a bunkhouse below, there was the music of a guitar.

Cardigan halted, stared for a moment into the dusk of the patio—a dusk broken by candle-lighted luminance from inside tall, opened windows. A tiny fountain tinkled in the darkness. And then a wraithlike figure glided out of the gloom toward him.

Dusky, shining eyes gleamed softly up at Cardigan through the dark. Two white hands fluttered to his shoulders, almost fearfully, tremulously. His dark brown fingers touched white arms.

"It is you, *mi* Caballero! I was afraid —the shooting! I knew you would come if all was well." The voice was softly happy.

"All is well," he answered gently. "I came but to say *adiosita*, Dolores. Good-by for a little while. To-morrow I ride north with a man from San Miguel. And when I come back, it will be for you; and I shall take you up there—home!"

A thrilled silence followed. "Home . . . " the girl whispered softly. And then, on the heels of it, premonition came. "There will be danger there—for you!" she whispered fiercely, and her hands tightened on his light shirt.

He shook his head. "I think not. But I will be back, anyway. For only a little while, Dolores!"

Bending, he pressed her hand with his lips. Caballero Cardigan, reared from youth in this land, had acquired all its graces and its little touches of nicety. These things were at strange variance with the reputation he had gained. For now he was gentle as a woman, graceful as a court gallant . . . the man whose name was feared, hated and cursed from here northward to San Miguel!

And she was of a race which accepts unquestioningly the verdicts of its men. She bent her proud head a little.

"If you must," she said simply. *"Vaya con Dios,* Caballero *mio.* Go with God—and I shall pray and wait for you."

A moment more and Caballero Cardigan was riding down through the darkness and across the valley again. He turned his mount loose in the corral and sought the house. Stevens was eating from a tray Yang had brought—a good sign, he thought.

Cardigan sat down across the room from his guest and rolled a cigarette. Stevens regarded him with questioning, rather suspicious eyes.

"I'm going north with you to-morrow," Cardigan said.

"Where to?" There was no acceptance in Stevens' reply; only curiosity.

"San Miguel."

The rancher snorted. "San Miguel? Caballero Cardigan walkin' into San Miguel?" The absurdity of the thought made him laugh.

But Cardigan did not laugh. He inhaled deeply. His eyes were quite grave. "Exactly," he said, with calm. "Have they got anything on me there?"

"Yore name.

"Not enough. Am I a rustler—or do they think I am?"

"Yore friends are."

"Not friends. I grew up with 'Wild Dick' Croker—he's bad, but a friend, I'll admit. Contreras is no friend. My father and he left each other alone because if they'd clashed, it would have meant hell for everybody. I'm a respectable rancher, and if I've ever drawn a gun or shot a man, it's been in self-defense. What can San Miguel do about that?"

"Ride yuh outa town. They don't want anybody with yore name, Cardigan.

That's that!" Joe Stevens was definite. "Yore ol' man left too much blood behind him."

"Yet he'd never done a thing in San Miguel, except refuse to leave there. And when they started forcing him, he did some shooting. Who wouldn't?" Cardigan murmured.

He allowed his words to die on the still air; then he tossed his cigarette into the open fireplace and stood up. He wore an air of authority.

"But there's more than that, Stevens—and you and San Miguel had better listen. You talk about Contreras, and you've got the right to. San Miguel will hear a lot more of that hombre, and right soon, too. You'll need me there. I know his style. And one thing I'm going to do is squash him up there—because there's where he's coming, from now on!"

Stevens looked up, puzzled, curious, at the man's intensity. "What's the idea?" he demanded. "If you've got a row with Contreras, why not fight it out down here, where half the country is with yuh and thinks yo're a hero? Why take it to San Miguel?"

Cardigan smiled softly. He spoke as softly.

"Because I've decided that San Miguel's going to be my home," he replied. "Because I want to bring my—my wife into my own country. I'm selling out here, and moving north; sabe? One reason is that, and that's enough. But another is—I'll feel more square with the world if I help to square up some of my father's accounts. He loved that town. They chased him out. But not only am I going to stay—I'm going to clean it for them. And from what I know of Contreras' plans, it's going to need lots of cleaning—*muy pronto!*"

Some of a forgotten youth—a youth of fire and daredeviltry and blazing courage such as had not yet even been extinguished by the years, gleamed in Joe Stevens' old eyes as he listened. He, too, knew what it was to carve out a home against odds. It had been the task of the white man for generations in this raw, new land. Admiration lighted his face.

Cardigan's fearless, steady eyes met his. Joe Stevens extended his hand.

"*Bueno!*" he decided. "Yuh'll probably get planted at the job. But at least, yuh've got one friend now who'll see that yo're buried—and that's more than yuh had this morning. We'll start to-morrow!"

CHAPTER III

San Miguel Hospitality

THE traveling had to be by easy stages. Stevens' wound was quite painful, Cardigan tended him carefully; but they broke the trip into two parts, and thus, circling San Miguel, after crossing the Border into Arizona, they arrived at the Circle S early in the morning of the second day.

Several cowboys rode up around them as they came slowly into the grounds. There were rapid questions; Joe Stevens' eyes burned as he made replies. At the steps of the comfortable ranch house, a motherly woman waited, outwardly placid as she could be—but Cardigan could see the haunting fear in her eyes.

"Joe! Are you all right?" That was all. Her hands made as if to reach out to Stevens where he sat his horse; then they were folded upon her bosom.

"Yeah, I'm all right, Mother. Little nick in the leg. Heal in a couple o' days."

Stevens slid off the horse on one foot and clung to the saddle with one hand, while his free arm embraced his wife. Cardigan saw the happy tears standing in her eyes. The men were watching him, quietly, speculatively.

"And they got Slim?" someone asked, at length.

"Right through the head—between the eyes," the rancher returned, his eyes far off and sorrowful. "Come up on us in a ravine—the ravine that led right to Contreras' hole. We trailed the stock that far without any trouble. I don't know how they missed me; but I run for it—run for hours. And then—" He looked at Cardigan.

The listening cowboys looked, too. They had been wondering about this slender, silent figure on the black horse, with

the two meaningful forty-fours thonged against his legs. These were dangerous days in the San Miguel Valley, and any stranger was under suspicion.

"I met up with Cardigan," Stevens said, after a pause. "He pulled me out, until his men come up. Then he brought me back here."

Mrs. Stevens looked grateful. She seemed about to speak. But there was an ugly stir among the riders.

"Cardigan?" one repeated. "Caballero?"

Stevens stiffened. The moment he had dreaded had come. Cardigan sat impassive as a rock.

"Yes, Caballero Cardigan," the ranchman said, his voice ringing with challenge. "And more than that, a friend o' mine when I needed a friend. He ain't with Contreras—because Contreras' men shot at him—to kill. And he ain't a rustler; and what's more, he ain't apologizin' for his father's name. He's got his own—and it's good on the Circle S!"

He glowered about belligerently. "Anybody that missed any o' that?"

The punchers shifted nervously. There was no friendliness in their looks, despite their employer's words.

"It's okay here, whatever yuh say, Joe," someone said. "But San Miguel ain't the Circle S. Or is Cardigan trailin' back for his own country?"

Cardigan met the speaker's eyes. "I'm in my own country," he replied steadily, "and I'm here to stay. No favors asked, and objections met when they come up. Have you got any?"

There was only the tiniest flicker of the amber-green light in the depths of his eyes; but it told enough. His hands were not exactly close to his guns; but something about them and him indicated that it would not take long for them to reach there. The man who had spoken lowered his eyes under Cardigan's stare.

"None from me, I reckon. I'll leave 'em to San Miguel. They got ideas o' their own down there about the Cardigan brand mark."

Cardigan turned away from him without comment.

"I'll be trailing along, Stevens," he said coolly. "I'll drop out to see you later, and see how the ankle's coming. He just needs to rest, ma'am, and to keep off that foot till it's healed."

He started to pick up his reins; but Mrs. Stevens, with an impulsive gesture, swept toward him, and caught one hand in both her own. She looked up at him.

"I've got to thank you for takin' care o' my Joe, Mr. Cardigan," she said. "I don't know what these fool boys are talkin' about, and I don't care. But I hope you keep out o' trouble, and I hope you'll remember that the Circle S is your home whenever you want to use it." She turned, not quite finished, and surveyed the quailing riders with a scornful stare: "That is, as long as *I'm* running the house!"

Cardigan smiled. "Thanks, Mrs. Stevens," he said. "I'll be back to see you." And he pressed her hand. With a nod to Joe, and ignoring the punchers further, he turned Diablo's head and trotted off. They watched him.

But he never looked back. The Circle S was forgotten as soon as he turned away. He had his own plans. He knew what Contreras contemplated as regarded San Miguel. There were to be wholesale raids and wholesale rustling. The district was to be beaten and fought down until Contreras and his gang ruled. In a way, the man was a kind of super-bandit. The proximity of the Border to San Miguel aided his plans.

Contreras had to be fought back with his own weapons. Cardigan had no particular hatred for him, though they were far from being friends. Contreras had resented for a long time the power that the owners of Puesta del Sol Rancho had wielded in Mexico.

Cardigan was going to enlist to fight him, to help clean up San Miguel. Thus in one stroke, he could clean off his father's score and establish himself there.

"*If* they let me!" he murmured grimly to himself, as he rode.

The way was pretty. The San Miguel Valley was a hill-bordered oasis of green, set amid the bleached whiteness of the

desert. It was quite cut off from the world and it managed its own affairs. It had, thus far; but now Cardigan knew that danger threatened the peace of the pleasant valley. Somewhere in those hills, Contreras lay, waiting—and there were others, too. . . .

Cardigan's eyes swept the pleasant landscape, the rich green of the hills and the slow-moving herds of cattle dotting them; and they were narrowed with the thought of the outlaw war which might soon drench those hills with blood.

San Miguel came into view. It was suddenly there, just below him, as the trail wound out along the edge of a palisade that became denuded of trees. He paused for a moment, his eyes glistening.

This was the place he had chosen for his home.

Red-tiled roofs and green-bordered patios—the occasional flash of a fountain's play in the bright sunlight. 'Dobe walls of pink and yellow and red. Trees, and a tiny, miniature plaza. All the lure of the quaintest of tiny Spanish towns—and yet it was in his own country.

When he rode into the town it was nearly noon. The place was coming to a sort of life. Men drifted about the streets, heading toward bars, poolrooms, or one of the two small restaurants. Cardigan was regarded out of suspicious eyes as he took his way down the wide main street. No one looked at him with anything approaching friendliness.

But he affected not to notice. He half halted before the sheriff's office, and then passed on toward what seemed the largest saloon in town. It was labeled "La Corona."

There were a few mounts tethered at the rack outside. Cardigan only threw his reins carelessly across it as he slid from Diablo's back. For a moment he stood in the entrance-way of the place, accustoming his eyes to the cool shadows within. Then he became aware that he was being studied in silence by everybody inside.

He smiled, nodded carelessly to two men he passed, and made his way to the bar. A bartender with suspicious eyes kept on wiping the counter and halted before him. Cardigan ordered and the man turned away, shooting a swift glance at a man who stood close beside the newcomer.

Cardigan surveyed this individual coolly. He was a solid-appearing type, dressed for the range, but with a light, well-cut jacket over his shirt—grizzled like Joe Stevens had been, his face seamed and lined and his eyes squinted from the winds and sun of the range. He met Cardigan's regard with an equal interest.

Cardigan smiled easily. "Nice town," he offered.

"Yeah." The answering voice was dry. "Never been here before?"

"No, never. I'm thinking of settling here."

The older man's eyes opened a trifle at that. "Lookin' for work, maybe?"

"That depends," Cardigan considered, and he downed his drink. "Depends on the work. I was thinking of starting a place of my own."

He was aware that the conversation had listeners. The man he had addressed seemed to be a person of some importance. No one attempted to interrupt him; while on the other hand, he seemed to have taken the floor for the interrogation of the stranger.

The man drew deeply on the black cigar in his mouth and through the smoke his eyes shone coldly.

"It's a right troublesome place to start anything in now," he said at last. "Bad hombres in these hills. Contreras was here yesterday—walked right into town. Know of him?"

Cardigan drew a quick breath. "Know of him? Yes. I know him—personally!"

He could feel the tensity that gripped his hearers. The air was electrified.

"Personally!" his interrogator repeated. "Where you from, stranger—if yuh feel like tellin'?"

"I don't mind," Cardigan said easily. He knew he had to face this thing sooner or later. It might just as well be now. "I just came across the line this morning, with Joe Stevens of the Circle S. I own the Puesta del Sol Ranch, near Matanzas.

That's where Contreras is from. My name—is Cardigan."

Swift and sure the shot told. The man facing him wrenched the cigar from his mouth and his whole bearing changed. His eyes glittered dangerously.

"Cardigan? Caballero—Cardigan?"

"That's what they call me, I suppose. It's only a nickname. But if you mean—am I Scar Cardigan's son?—yes!"

His very boldness held them at bay. There was no move made. He sensed, though, that they were waiting for the man who had been questioning him. That individual stood frozen for a minute. The next, his clenched fist banged down on the bar.

"I suppose it ain't no killin' matter—yet, son," he said, "but it right soon will be, if yuh stay here. My name's Jeff Ragnan, and I'm still carrying around two holes yore father made in me when he said his last good-bys here. There's nobody by the name o' Cardigan ever goin' to stay long in this town!"

He stopped, waited.

"I think I am, though," Cardigan said softly. "I like it."

Ragnan's mouth was grim. "It won't be healthy," he gave assurance. "Listen, Cardigan. I may not be the whole law hereabouts, but I've got a lot to say. You better make tracks fast and get back to yore greaser friends—because this town ain't goin' to hold yuh after sundown!"

Abruptly he turned away. Cardigan might have expected some further demonstration; but there was none. It was as though Ragnan had laid the ultimatum down. They would back it up when Ragnan gave the word. After the straight, square shoulders of the old ranchman had passed through the doorway, several others drifted out in his wake. Cardigan received sullen, suspicious looks—unfriendly glances, but that was all. He stood alone, isolated, before the bar.

Alone—for some moments. He had not noticed the three men at the farther end of the bar. They had listened earnestly to the recent conversation. He rolled a cigarette; and as he was moistening the edge of the paper, looked up to see these three moving idly toward him. They were led by a tall, dark-faced individual with a heavy black mustache.

The latter halted. There was a slightly amused smile—a cruel smile, on his heavy lips.

"So yo're Cardigan?"

The cigarette drooped from Cardigan's lips. He leaned lazily against the bar.

"I'm sure going to be sick of my own name before I leave this country," he smiled. "I am. What about it?"

Across the room, at one of the tables, an old-timer, who had come in since Ragnan's departure, looked up with some interest. He studied the youth's face.

"Friend o' Contreras', too, did I hear yuh say?" the owner of the mustaches pursued.

"No, you didn't hear me say it. I said I knew him. We're not friends. Any more questions?" The edge of steel had crept into Cardigan's voice. These were dangerous men, and he did not like the way the flanking pair had drawn clear of their leader and free to use their guns.

The dark man's face clouded. There had been direct challenge in Cardigan's tone.

"No more questions, no," he said, his lips jerking in ugly fashion. "Orders, instead. It don't matter what Ragnan had to say. Yo're not wanted in San Miguel. The orders are to get out—now!"

Cardigan considered swiftly. These men were not of the stern, fierce breed of Jeff Ragnan. They probably had less cause to dislike him than the old rancher. And in this man's words now there was straight challenge. They knew him. They knew that this ultimatum they had given him was not the sort he would accept. In other words, they wanted him to fight. And fight—with these odds—meant certain death.

His eyes narrowed. There was still laziness in his manner as he straightened, and his fingertips rested lightly on his hips in a way he had.

"Just who are you, and why the order?" he asked.

"Who? I'm Loughran!" The man laughed. "That don't mean nothin' to yuh

maybe; but it's enough. Git! Vamose outa San Miguel and stay out!"

The two men behind him tensed, waiting like hounds straining at the leash. In the next second, smoke and powder would obscure that little scene, and somebody would be dead. But even yet Cardigan gave no sign that he was afraid.

"I'm staying in San Miguel," he said softly. "Maybe you didn't hear me tell Jeff Ragnan that. It's so!"

The eyes of his antagonist lighted fiercely, exultantly. In that instant, Cardigan knew well that this was just what the man had hoped for. They wanted to kill him—not to get him out of San Miguel, but to finish him.

"And I'm tellin' yuh, Cardigan—"

Cardigan sensed that in the next second he must draw. The others were ready. He did not move yet, however—and before Loughran could say more, another voice broke in.

"That'll do, Loughran—you've had yore say. And keep the hands off'n them guns!"

Cardigan had not noticed that the old, sunburnt man across the room had risen and moved toward him. He noticed the man now, however. There was a quaint, old world flavor of charm about the tall, lean figure; an eternal youth in the lean frame; a vitality even in the way the old-timer's long white hair flowed from under his wide-brimmed sombrero. Certainly he wore an air of authority. But he carried only one gun and his hands were not near it.

The three dropped back before him, however, instinctively. Loughran's eyes flashed angrily.

"What's this o' yore business, Pendexter?" he demanded.

"Nothin' more than fair play is every man's business," came back coolly. "I don't know what yore game is; but if yuh've got a quarrel with this stranger, take him on alone. I reckon he won't mind. I'll see that yore prairie dogs stay to themselves."

Then Cardigan smiled. "Exactly," he drawled. "I wouldn't even mind two of 'em at once, *amigo;* if this hombre feels in that kind of humor, I'll oblige him."

Old Pendexter smiled, too. Loughran snarled and backed still further.

"We'll let it go—for now!" he said. "It ain't no good buckin' you, Pendexter—yuh've got too many friends to snarl at the heels of a man who does. I'll settle later."

With a jerk of his head, he herded his two men out with him. Cardigan stood looking after them as they vanished through the door. He shook his head, a little, quirking smile on his straight lips.

"First thing you know, I'm going to get the idea that I'm not wanted much in this town," he breathed.

CHAPTER IV

WILD DICK CROKER

THE tall man of the desert and plains turned slowly and viewed the youth for whom he had interceded. Blue, keen eyes as level and sharp as a knife's edge, took in every detail of Cardigan's appearance in one swift glance.

"Not wanted? Yeah, you'll get the idea sooner or later—if yuh live long enough," he said. "Did I hear 'em say you was Cardigan? Scar Cardigan's son?"

The older man nodded. "That's it, then. No wonder they don't want yuh. Met up with Jeff Ragnan?"

"He told me to get out by sundown."

"Goin'?"

"I don't think so. I like San Miguel. I'd like to live here." Cardigan looked out again through the open doorway.

"Better make up yore mind to going, anyhow," the plainsman said succinctly. "What Jeff says goes, around here, pretty much. I can't figger Loughran hatin' yuh like he does, though. Yuh never knew him before?"

"Never. Who is he?"

"Small rancher. Not very prosperous, and not too well liked. Nobody knows him awful well—don't like the men he's got at his place; but he's always minded his own business and behaved pretty much."

Cardigan nodded. He looked up with one of his frank, youthful smiles.

"Anyway, the name doesn't seem to be such poison to you; and I haven't told you that I'm grateful you walked in there. I'd have been buzzard meat by now, I guess, if you hadn't."

The older man's face was serious. For the first time Cardigan saw the innate, eaglelike strength of it, the rocklike imperturbability of the man. Here was a character molded and hardened by the far open.

"My name's Walt Pendexter. I knew yore old man and I didn't hate him, like the others. He saved my life once, and I saved his. He stuck by his pals, even if he was a bit wild, and a lot bad. But even if I had somethin' agin him, it wouldn't mean much where his son is concerned."

There was a wealth of simple philosophy in the calm, considered words. But Cardigan forgot it.

"Walt Pendexter!" he exclaimed. The name had been for years one of the most famous on the open range. It was a byword that brought up memories of all the old-time scouts and Indian fighters, buffalo hunters and guides of the days now ended. The name was almost a legend; Cardigan had never hoped to come face to face with the flesh and blood image. All this was in his tone.

"I'd never expected to meet you, sir," he said, with that peculiar, Latin courtesy that was a product of years of environment. "It's an honor."

"Mmm," Pendexter agreed briefly. "From what I hear, you've been busy makin' a reputation yoreself." He glanced at the tightly-thonged guns at Cardigan's hips.

Cardigan shook his head. "My father made me learn them—kept on pounding 'em into me since I was a baby. Them, and roping, and knives and fists. Said I'd need 'em in this country, when I decided to come back."

"What made yuh come back?"

Cardigan hesitated. "It was time," he said quietly. "I'll tell you sometime, maybe, Pendexter, if you're interested. The thing that matters is—I'm going to stay here!"

"No yo're not!" The scout's voice was decisive. "They's too much hell bein' raised around these parts. They know you and yore ol' man was mixed up with Contreras—with Wild Dick Croker, too—they're friends o' your'n, anyway. And all San Miguel valley's scared o' Contreras hanging around here. Not while that gang's in this country will yuh stay—I promise yuh."

Cardigan's eyes were cold. "I doubt if they'll kill a man—for nothing," he said softly. "And if they start, they'll have to do that."

"They'll lynch yuh—the mob, once it gets worked up. The valley's scared, I tell yuh." Pendexter signed to the bartender and ordered two drinks. The man looked surprised, but served them. The old man turned again to Cardigan.

"Leave here. Come with me to-night. Maybe later, if yo're still determined, it won't be so hard to break into this town. If yuh stay here now, yo're cooked."

"Where are you going?"

"Trail drive. That's what I'm in San Miguel for. Escort. Lot o' Ragnan's cattle to be moved to Aja Junction—that's a long hike, and Contreras is in the country. Want a job?"

"With Ragnan?" Cardigan smiled.

"With me! I take whoever I please."

Cardigan shook his head slowly. "I don't think so—yet," he said. "I'm going to stick till I find out what this is all about. I'm grateful, though, Pendexter."

"Never mind that," the old-timer returned grimly. "I hate to see yuh get strung up so young, that's all. And I could use another man who knows trailin'—and can shoot. Think it over. If yuh want the job, be here at about nine to-night. I'm pickin' up the herd on the trail."

He walked with Cardigan to the door. There they both halted.

San Miguel panted in the awful heat of the day, but even the shimmering heat devils could not hide the quiet, awesome beauty of the little town. Beyond the shacks across the street, the green hills formed a verdant background, sloping down to the outskirts. A small fountain played among some palms at the farther

end of the street. The town was almost deserted at this hour; a pleasant languor pervaded it. It was a place of peace.

The thoughts of both men must have been very much alike. Pendexter sighed.

"Yeah, it's a plumb nice place to come to—after shootin' and troubles and bloodshed. Plumb—" he hesitated—"home!"

Cardigan nodded slowly. "It's what I knew I'd find. I've seen all the outlawry and trouble and fighting that I want by now, Pendexter. And I'm going to stay here. I've decided!"

Pendexter did not reply at once. He gave a brief nod, at length. "I reckon maybe yuh ain't so wrong, at that, Cardigan. It's worth fightin' for. It's gonna be my home, too. I'll help yuh if I can."

Cardigan straightened. "Where's the sheriff? In his office?"

"Probably. Jim Croogan." Pendexter motioned to the 'dobe dwelling Cardigan had earlier observed. "Tell him I'm a friend o' your'n, if yuh like—but it won't help. Croogan can't do nothin' if this gang's against yuh."

Cardigan started down the street, the reins of the black slung through his arm, while Pendexter turned back inside. Cardigan scarcely heard the hoofbeats behind him. It was hot, and he felt the heat sapping at his very sinews. He walked slowly. But before he reached Croogan's office, a horseman had drawn up beside him hurriedly.

"Hey! You Caballero Cardigan?"

There was a twisted smile at his lips when he halted and looked up. A dark-browed, lean rider with the mark of a bullet on his jawbone, sat his saddle just above him.

"I'm sure getting known here," he murmured. "What about it?"

The man looked about him swiftly, as if fearful of being overheard. Then he bent down in his saddle.

"I come from Dick Croker," he said swiftly. "He heard yuh was in San Miguel. Wants to see yuh—*muy pronto!*"

Cardigan's expression changed instantly. Wild Dick Croker—here! He had heard of Dick's presence somewhere in this vicinity; but he had not expected him as close as this. That meant more trouble.

He liked Dick. The two had grown up together in Mexico; they had been trained in the same school. Dick was as close to being a friend as Cardigan boasted. He, too, was an exile from his own country.

But Dick had chosen the other way—the way into which Cardigan might have found it so easy to be driven. If they would not accept him as an honest man, then he determined to be an outlaw. Fair enough—to Dick Croker. But Cardigan was of a slightly sterner breed; just as Scar Cardigan, for all his outlawry and crimes, was a man respected by such men as knew him personally.

Cardigan frowned. "Where is Dick?" he asked.

"I'll take yuh to him. It ain't far. Can yuh come now?"

He hesitated. To have a rendezvous with Dick Croker was a bad way to start his career in San Miguel. But he could see that it had to be. Even Dick must understand him. For answer, he drew the black toward him and swung into the saddle.

"Lead the way," he ordered briefly.

Sweat streaming unheeded down both their faces, they struck out of town in the direction opposite that by which Cardigan had entered it. They mounted over the ridge of hills westward and then curved down over fairly open country toward the desert stretching endlessly southward. It was a hard trail, in that deadly heat, and they scarcely spoke.

It was long past midday when the guide drew rein and Cardigan pulled up beside him. A steep hillside was before them, and a crystal pure stream leapt out from the rocks. The guide drew a pistol and fired twice in quick succession.

They waited.

There came the bark of two shots from halfway up the hill, and the guide grunted. They started off again. After a while, they had to dismount and lead their horses. Presently Cardigan could hear the stream again; and a moment later they emerged in an open glade where the sun was almost entirely shut out.

Three men were there, around a smol-

dering campfire, where a tipped over coffee pot and a few dirty plates attested to a recent meal. The tallest of the three—a young man of almost the same build as Cardigan, arose quickly and smiling at sight of them. The other two hung back.

"Hello, Ned—howdy!"

"Hello, Dick!"

Cardigan's greeting was genuine, as was Dick Croker's. There was a lot of the same breed about these two—a lot more than even the way each wore two low-hanging forty-fours and had the same general build. Dick Croker, though, was light-haired, very handsome; he had some of the sparkling recklessness that was in Cardigan's make-up; but somehow, his handsome face held less of that innate stubbornness and inflexible character that was the other man's. His eyes were not shifty, nor afraid; but they were not the cool, steady eyes of the man he faced.

The other men were far beneath him—that was obvious in a single glance. One was a hulking, swarthy fellow in a dirty, red plaid shirt. He was a typical bad character; and his huge hands seemed always twitching to get at his heavy guns. The other was a breed, sallow-cheeked, mustached—sullen of eye. They were regarding Cardigan studiously.

"Heard yuh was headin' for San Miguel, Ned," Dick Croker said. "I knew it meant trouble, and wanted to get to yuh first. I ain't popular down there. Sit down. Coffee?"

"Yes."

Cardigan squatted near the fire, while Croker poured a tin cup of coffee and introduced his two companions as Murray and Toros. Cardigan had heard of Murray—"Tick" Murray, they called him, along the Border, and he had been outlawed from every town along the line for years. Toros acknowledged the introduction sullenly, and they, too, squatted across the fire.

"I heard you were here, too, Dick," Cardigan said. "What's up? And why send for me?"

"All in time!" Croker waved his hand airily and passed the cup. He grinned as he sat down. "Did yuh find any welcomin' committee and brass bands when yuh came into San Miguel?"

"Not much. I'm ordered out."

"Goin'?"

"No. I'm staying."

"Maybe." Croker considered. "Yuh can't, Ned—they won't let us be on the level, whether we want to or not. Better take the best way." He waited.

Cardigan met his eyes. "Your way, Dick?"

"Why not?" For a moment, Croker's handsome face was dark with bitterness. "They've done branded me, and I'll accept the brand. If they say I'm an outlaw, I'm a real one. There's things due to happen in this valley."

"I know it. Contreras is here."

"More than Contreras. *We're* here! Toros and Murray, and more. There's a gang behind me now, Ned—this is only a little conference party, with you. The rest of 'em's back a ways. We're camped in these hills. And we're joining with Contreras!"

Cardigan's eyes clouded. "You, Dick—you with Contreras?" His tone conveyed more than his words.

Croker flushed. "I've got to be, for a time. We're goin' to clean out here, and then beat it. Afterward—" he shrugged. "Contreras and me both know we can't be friends long. Later, we'll either split up and forget it, or Contreras and me'll shoot it out. But right now we got San Miguel Valley to loot first!"

He stopped. Cardigan sat as if waiting for more, but no more came. Croker eyed him thoughtfully, as though waiting for him to speak. The other men watched Cardigan with lowering eyes. At last he looked up.

"It'll be a losing game, but it's yours, Dick," he said. "I know better than to try to talk you out of it, though. What did you send for me for?"

Murray growled something into his heavy black beard. Croker looked at Cardigan as though he suspected him of cross purposes. But Cardigan's eyes were calm. The young outlaw swore.

"Hell! I wanted to give yuh the chance to join us—naturally! What else? They

don't want yuh down there; yuh've found that out by now, I reckon. I want yuh with me. Between us, we can own this damned country!"

Cardigan shook his head and got lazily to his feet.

"I thought yuh knew me better, Dick. I'll never go in for rustling. I wouldn't join you if it meant hanging to stay away from this game!"

Croker was on his feet, too. His face flushed. For an instant his eyes blazed. Then he bit his lip.

"All right. That's yore final?"

"Absolutely! And if I stay in San Miguel—well, I'll have to be on their side, Dick. I wish you were operating somewhere else, if you've got to play this game."

The handsome lips twisted again with bitterness. "I'll play mine and you play yores. Yores is the losin' one. But I hope we don't meet up, ever, Ned."

"So do I."

Cardigan put out his hand. He liked this youth who was so like him and yet so utterly different in his thoughts. Croker pressed the outstretched hand hard.

"Good luck, *amigo mio,*" he said gravely.

"Good luck—!"

Cardigan broke off as Murray's heavy bulk heaved itself toward them.

"Hell! Yuh mean to say yo're lettin' him go away from here?" the gunman bellowed. Behind him Toros pressed up, ugly and glittering of eye; while the man who had guided Cardigan to the spot hung off, waiting.

Croker took a single step backward, and his manner had suddenly changed. His eyes were deadly; his lips were parted just a trifle, and there was a suggestion of a crouch in the way he stood.

"I asked him to come here, and he's goin' as he came," Croker said slowly—tensely. "Just like he came—savvy that? And if anybody's got any more to say about it—let him say his prayers first and then say it to me! Go ahead, Murray—talk, if there's still some talk in yuh!"

But Tick Murray, for all his deadly hands and heavy guns, fell back before the something of unleashed fierceness about the young outlaw leader in that moment. Cardigan stood easily, coldly. He looked as though he might welcome a clash with these men.

But there was none. Murray's eyes glowered. He mumbled something into his beard. "It's yore game, I reckon, Chief," he growled as he turned away.

"Yo're plenty right, it is!" Croker's laugh was deadly cold. Then he turned back to Cardigan and he was his old, careless boyish self. "So long—again, Ned!" That was all.

"So long, Dick."

Heavily, Cardigan got to Diablo and took his slow way back down the trail. Wild Dick and Contreras—and down in San Miguel, he had been ordered out by sundown. He squinted at the sun, shrugged, and pointed his mount's head back for the town.

CHAPTER V

"KEEP ON TRAILIN'."

CARDIGAN rode without eagerness. He was not anxious for what he knew he must face in San Miguel. He could sense the bitterness which had driven Wild Dick Croker into the game he played. Only it was not in him. Besides—there was Dolores. Cardigan had entered a bitter fight; and the stake for which he played was the right to stand before the whole world as a free and honest man.

He wished he knew the location of Ragnan's ranch. He would have liked to talk to Jeff Ragnan again. It was plain that Ragnan was one of the most powerful spirits in the valley, and that his word was close to law.

Ragnan hated the name that Cardigan bore. Yet he must be a fair man, in the end. The old feud should be dead. Cardigan knew how long it takes to end such feuds; but he still had hope.

The sun was moving more rapidly now toward the horizon. There were not many hours before dark. Cardigan could not help but wonder what reception would be prepared for him in San Miguel. He had

no certain idea of what part he would play when he faced it. He hoped to bluff it out. If only Ragnan were not so bitterly opposed to him, there might be some chance!

His thoughts broke suddenly. The trail he was following led through a draw; and to the right of him, patches of yellow cliff face could be seen like scars through green foliage. The whine of a bullet made Diablo jerk up and brought Cardigan's bent head back.

Instinctively, he flung himself from his saddle; but even as he did so, a second shot came. He saw the flash. It had come from ahead of him, from a point just above the trail.

Instantly caution was forgotten and his plans changed. He had no rifle, else he would have fired at the flash. But being shot at was enough to make Cardigan see red. Instead of dropping back alongside the road into safety, he swung back into his saddle and dug in his spurs.

"At 'em, Diablo!"

The animal responded like the thoroughbred he was. Horse and rider charged for the point of land from whence the shots had come. For an instant, the very unexpectedness of Cardigan's tactics seemed to hold the ambusher in a spell, for no shot came at once.

He rode swaying back and forth in his saddle, a weaving, crazy target. A second later another shot sang wide of him. He laughed. The spur was just ahead. Diablo leapt a small ditch, came up with a mighty heave; and, obedient to its rider's guidance, tore for the hidden assailant.

Another shot! Diablo went crashing through the underbrush. Cardigan loosed one revolver.

Crack! A bullet clipped the leaves beside his hat, and this time he answered it from the saddle. There was a yell of pain. The brush wavered.

Suddenly, white-faced, crazy with fear, a man leapt up into view, staring with terrorized eyes upon the spectacle of this mad rider and his surging beast. A rifle was in his hand. Cardigan brought up his gun again.

In a last, despairing effort—accompanied by a wild cry—the man threw up his gun and tried to aim. But he was too late. Cardigan's gun spoke twice, and the two bullets spaced themselves scarcely more than an inch apart between the bushwhacker's eyes.

Diablo came to a prancing stop and Cardigan slid from the saddle, dropping his gun into place. A few yards away, a lone mount stood hobbled. Cardigan dropped on his knees beside his victim, and swore.

The man was too utterly dead to be of any use to him.

He got up slowly, and through narrowed eyes searched the countryside. From where he was, though, there existed no sign of life. He looked down at the dead body again—there was nothing about the man, except a stubble of beard, to make him stand out anywhere or to identify him.

Cardigan ran his hands over the pockets, and brought to life nothing more interesting than a half-gnawed plug of tobacco.

He frowned. "They certainly want to make sure of me," he said aloud, shaking his head.

Suddenly he became alert again. From the other side of the bank, came the sound of a scrambling horse. He rested his hand lightly on the butt of his forty-four, stepped back slightly from the body of his victim, and waited.

The plunging through the underbrush and up the steep slope continued. One horse. Cardigan was cool. Then the animal broke through the brush and Cardigan saw the rider. It was a boy of not more than fifteen—a keen-eyed youth who rode with a supple, trained grace, as though he had been born to the saddle. He brought up, wide-eyed and startled, at the grim figure that Cardigan suddenly made.

Cardigan smiled to reassure him. "It's all right," he said, "come right along to the party. Unless you're afraid of men with bullets in 'em."

"I ain't afraid of nothing!" the youth boasted, and his tone did not bely him. Coming closer, he bent over the man's

prone figure; but for all his gameness, his eyes popped.

"Do you know him?" Cardigan asked.

The boy shook his head. He slipped easily from the saddle; and in his swift, comprehensive survey of the scene, Cardigan could detect the range training of him.

"Never saw him before—but then, I don't go to town much. I heard the shootin', that's all, and I wanted to see what it's about." He looked again at rifle and hobbled beast, and at the man's position. "Bushwhacked yuh, eh? Gosh, yuh must've rode 'im right down from the trail!" His blue eyes were wide with keen admiration.

"I had to. I had no rifle," Cardigan said dryly. "If I'd taken cover down there, he might've hit my horse, he's that bad a shot. And I've got objections to that." He looked at the man who had ambushed him. There seemed no solution to the mystery.

"I suppose he'll have to be buried, anyway," he said at last. "Maybe somebody can recognize him first. Any outfit near here?"

"My pap's," the youngster responded promptly. "Come on—ride over there with me. It's only a mile or so beyond this hill, only yuh can't see it from here. Pap'll send out somebody to see if they can tell who he is."

Cardigan nodded. "Which outfit is it?"

"Flyin' R. I'm young Jeff Ragnan. Heard o' my ol' man?"

Cardigan started. This was Jeff Ragnan's son! He stared harder. For an instant the thought came that Ragnan might have despatched this would-be killer on the ground—then it was dismissed instantly. That would not be Ragnan's way.

"What's the matter?" Young Ragnan was growing suspicious of Cardigan's stare. "Ain't you a friend o' my pap's?"

"I'm not an enemy, anyway," Cardigan answered gravely. "But I don't think he's any special friend of mine. Anyhow, I'll go along with you. I wanted to have a chance to see him."

The boy eyed him again. Cardigan got into the saddle, and the lad's eyes lighted with admiration at the black beast he bestrode. He took in the saddle tooling and the ornate bridle. Cardigan himself was sufficiently picturesque and a dandy of the range to give rise to the youth's speculation.

"Yo're a stranger hereabouts, huh, pardner?"

"Mexico." Cardigan smiled as they started off. "Ever been there?"

The boy shook his head. "I'd like to go. It ain't far." He hesitated, keen hero-worship shining in his eyes. "You must be a right smart caballero down there, huh? I'd like to trail through with yuh."

Cardigan smiled. He liked this youth instinctively. "Maybe you can," he promised. "But maybe your dad wouldn't like it. He don't like me."

A flame lighted in the boy's eyes. "If he don't like yuh, I reckon there's a good reason for it," he said stubbornly. Cardigan only smiled quietly again, liking the youth's loyalty; and after a moment, young Jeff Ragnan added—almost unwillingly:

"Jest the same, I can't see no reason for it. They ain't nothin' wrong about yuh to me!"

Cardigan sobered. "I've never done anything wrong, if that's what you mean," he said. "Just the same, young Jeff, you're right in taking your father's side. He's probably got a reason. But whatever it is, it's for nothing I ever did to him. Is that enough?"

"Plenty!" The boy looked up with a frank, keen smile. "We can be friends, then!"

"Right!"

They rode along in pleasant silence. To the boy, who had been taken into comradeship with a man he had seen "get his man," emotions were too full for expression. He was proud. He waved his hand toward the Flying R acres patronizingly, but as though he wanted Cardigan to understand that he was the heir to something of consequence.

They came up along a narrow trail that wound into a maze of bunkhouses, cook shack—and the dominant bulk of the big ranch house topping them all.

Jeff Ragnan himself was on the veranda as the two pulled up. He stared—then got quickly to his feet. Recognizing Cardigan, his shaggy brows came down and he hurried down the steps.

"Friend o' mine, pap," the boy introduced. "Met him on the trail. Somebody shot at him from cover and he got him."

Ragnan's lips twisted cynically. "Somebody shot *from cover,* eh?" he sneered. "Sure it was the other feller?"

"Pretty sure," Cardigan said, unruffled. "I had to leave him where he was—thought someone might be able to identify him."

"I heard the shootin'!" the boy hastened to say in Cardigan's defense. "A lot o' rifle shootin', and then about two barks of a forty-four. I rode up just as he got him."

Ragnan turned to his son. He saw the eager flush on the boy's face and the shining, admiring eyes. His features hardened.

"Git inside, Jeff," he said evenly. "*Pronto.* I don't want yuh talkin' to this hombre again; savvy that? He's no friend of any part of our family!"

The youth turned away as though ashamed. Once he tried to look at Cardigan; but loyalty to his father had the better of it. He slipped from his mount and led it off around to the rear of the house.

Ragnan waited until he was gone. "What's the idea o' comin' here, Cardigan?" he demanded. "If I'd thought any o' my men'd know yuh, I'd have left orders to shoot on sight when yuh appeared on any part of the Flyin' R."

"I was shot at pretty close to the Flying R," Cardigan answered steadily. "I only came here because it was the nearest outfit. Somebody around these parts must know that hombre that did the shooting, and I wanted you to send out to see."

Ragnan nodded. "If that's all, yuh can keep on trailin'. I'll send a man."

He waited for Cardigan to obey. But Cardigan still sat his saddle.

"I wanted to say something to you, too, Mr. Ragnan," he said gravely. "I'm going back to San Miguel, in spite of what you said. If anything happens to me, it's happening to a man who hasn't got a crime on his record. I thought you might be fair enough to want to look that fact in the face."

"There's a crime on yore record that yuh'll never live down, boy!" the ranchman thundered. "It's yore name. And if anything happens to yuh in San Miguel, yo're asking for it by goin' back there. They'll be lookin' for yuh!" He pointed to the trail. "Now—*vamos!*"

Cardigan waited for no more. There was no need. Ragnan was inflexible; and to argue further would be only to invite trouble with the ranchman himself—which Cardigan did not want. He only gave a brief nod and turned the black's head. Without another word, he took his way toward the town.

Ragnan would not be there, he reasoned. It was close to sundown. Evidently the rancher had simply given his dictum and relied upon the community to carry it out. Cardigan felt very bitter in that moment; but never once did a bitter thought assail the father who had left him such a heritage. A man had to make his own fight—he would make his.

It was nearing sundown. Cardigan knew it would be night before he could get to San Miguel: the time would be expired. It was possible, however, that they thought him gone and had made no plans for his reception.

In any event, he was hungry and he wanted to eat. He did not propose to call upon Stevens for any hospitality. So it had to be San Miguel, whether they wanted to hang him or not. It was a grim thought; and he had to smile a little to himself.

Sundown came, and darkness followed swiftly. The lights of San Miguel appeared out of the dark and Diablo, who had been ridden most of the day, went toward them at a trot. Cardigan did not urge the beast; he was not eager for the showdown in the town, except that he wanted it over with.

But there was no one waiting when he entered at the end of the street from which he had taken his departure for Croker's hiding place. He circled the lit-

tle plaza, quiet and quite at peace now, and went on down the main street, looking in vain for a sign of hostility or of men waiting for him.

The town seemed entirely normal. Men calmly passed in and out of the lighted store fronts, scarcely noticing him. He was noticed, however, before he was halfway down the length of the street. A group of hard-faced, cold-eyed men gathered in the doorway of the Frontier Saloon after he passed, watching his progress. But these made no move as yet.

He reached the Corona, where he had left Walt Pendexter. He brought Diablo to the hitching-rack. But even before he could dismount, Pendexter himself emerged from the interior and confronted him. Behind Pendexter came another man, a more diminutive figure, with piercing dark eyes and a beaked nose.

"Better not go in here," the scout said quietly.

Cardigan frowned. "Damned if I won't, Pendexter!" he exclaimed. "I'm tired and I'm hungry. How come they're not after me already?" He looked down the street.

"They were ready—with a rope—at sunset," Pendexter retorted dryly. "I told 'em to clear off—that you were hired by me, and only comin' back to meet me." He jerked his thumb toward his companion. "This is Jim Croogan, sheriff hereabouts, and a friend o' mine. He knows."

Croogan gave a grim nod. "We've been waitin' for yuh, Cardigan. I backed up Jeff when he told 'em. But yuh'll have to make good on it."

Cardigan considered. These men were not alarmists. Undoubtedly they had saved his life to-night. But he hated to quit. Pendexter invaded his perplexity.

"If yo're spoilin' for trouble, yuh'll probably find plenty of it with me, anyhow," he said. "We might meet up with Contreras—they been watching every drive since the round-up, and this is a pretty big one. It certainly wouldn't hurt yore standing here none if yuh come up against Contreras!"

That made up Cardigan's mind. He gave a brief nod, but nevertheless swung out of the saddle and jumped to the ground.

"All right," he said. "I'm hired. But I'll eat first, if I've got to eat dangling from a rope. And Diablo's got to have some feed before I can head him out anywhere again, too!"

Pendexter laughed, and there was a glint of interest in Croogan's penetrating eyes.

"All right," the scout agreed. "We'll eat with yuh. At that, I can't risk losin' a good trail man jest because he's plumb sot on bein' a danged fool!"

CHAPTER VI

Contreras Strikes

THE trail crew was short-handed for the two thousand or more heads that were to be driven eastward to Aja, the nearest rail junction. It was a hard enough road, anyway, mostly over open desert, with water holes problematical at best. And now, Contreras was somewhere among the hills that sloped from the north into the desert, adding to the menace.

Contreras had struck but once thus far, and that could not be proved. He had even dared venture into San Miguel after his raid. It had been a smaller herd, but the attack had been successful.

The Flying R shipment that Pendexter was escorting was not exceptionally large; but it was worthy loot. Six Flying R men accompanied it, including the trail boss; and beyond these, there were Pendexter's two men, himself, and Cardigan. Originally, however, these latter four had been intended simply as a measure of precaution in the event of a raid from Contreras. Pendexter's services were at a premium in the San Miguel Valley these days.

Cardigan and Pendexter rode out of town and soon picked up the wide swath made by the driven steers, which had started off the Flying R range early that day. Soon they came within sight of the night's encampment, some six miles outside San Miguel. The cattle were a black, slow-moving mass in the darkness.

One or two fires glowed, but there were only the embers. About them were the recumbent forms of the weary riders; and

off outside the fringes of the herd a lone cowboy sang a droning chant to the restless beasts.

Borden, Ragnan's trail boss, roused himself from his blankets when Pendexter dismounted near him; but he did not get up.

"Howdy, Walt. Expected yuh sooner. Yore boys hit us along sundown. You'll find 'em curled up over yonder."

"Asleep?" Pendexter frowned.

"Probably. I don't reckon we've got much to fear this close to town." Borden hesitated. "I'm sure worried, though. Short-handed. Contreras close by—and they's rumors that that Wild Dick Croker's hereabouts. New man yuh got there? Good! We can stand a few more." And with a grunt, the grizzled veteran of many drives turned over and resumed his rest.

Pendexter made his way to where two men lay muffled in blankets not far from where their horses were picketed. He looked down at them.

"Carewe! Gordon!"

The forms took on life. "Hullo, Chief," Carewe grunted. "Wondered when yuh'd strike us."

Pendexter nodded. "Held up in town. Brought along a new man. The name is Cardigan—he's workin' with us."

"Cardigan?" Carewe got slowly to his feet to peer into the stranger's face. "Not—?"

"Hell, yes—Caballero Cardigan!" broke in the man in question. "Objections here, too?"

Carewe's eyes flamed suddenly in the light from the glowing coals nearby. He started to make a quick move—a move that might have meant his death in that instant, for Cardigan was in no mood for choosing words. But Pendexter stepped in quickly.

"Cut that!" he commanded in a low, peremptory voice. "You, Carewe, get it straight. When a man's workin' for me, *I* ask all the questions! Sabe? If that don't go with you, get on yore hoss and start trailin' back!"

Carewe growled, stood hesitant for a moment, then his glance fell before the old master in the ancient ranger's eyes. He shrugged and turned back to his blankets.

"All right," he said. "I reckon maybe you know best, Chief. *Buenas noches.*"

Gordon, the second man of the escort, had risen in his blankets. Pendexter now turned to him. "You heard that, too?" he asked.

"Plenty! Hell, yes!" And Gordon dove hurriedly back under cover.

Cardigan had already turned and was unsaddling. He let Diablo loose without hobbling. He flung his blankets on the ground and used his saddle for a pillow, scooping out the sandy earth where his hips and shoulders fitted. Pendexter lay down nearby, and in a moment the camp was asleep.

News of Cardigan's identity got about when the chuck wagon began dispensing coffee in the gray of early dawn. He paid it no heed, however, and seemed not to notice the half-curious, dubious eyes that focused upon him. Carewe, even if he had a grievance, had been effectively silenced the night before; and in less than half an hour there was plenty to occupy the members of that caravan.

The cattle were on the move again. Dust rose in an unceasing cloud from the hundreds of hoofs. The cowboys had their work cut out for them. Alternating frequently, two of the Pendexter men would ride ahead together and two served as outposts flanking the drive. But there was no sign of Contreras that day.

Toward sundown, with the nearest water hole not far away, Borden, Ragnan's trail boss, dropped back to where Pendexter and Cardigan had closed up. Everyone looked weary and dispirited.

"I'm scared, Walt," he confessed. "We got two more days o' this, and it don't seem likely Contreras is going to lay up in them hills and jest watch us. And short-handed like we are—Hell! If they just start shootin'; these cows'll stampede and finish it for 'em."

Pendexter nodded. He looked at Cardigan.

"How many men's Contreras got with him, do yuh suppose, Caballero?" he asked.

Borden shot the new man a strange

look, but said nothing. Cardigan considered.

"Enough," he said. "Like Borden says, he won't need to do anything but start shooting—that's the danger. I think a lot of his gang is still across the line."

"And Croker?" Pendexter was looking hard at him.

"He's hereabouts," Cardigan returned promptly. "I know that. But I don't think either one of 'em would throw a lot of men in at us. They'll know that a stampede is enough, and if they're after us at all, it'll be an ambush."

Borden was watching him with keen, inscrutable eyes; but the foreman's brief nod of agreement was confirmation of Cardigan, too.

"I reckon we boys ain't gonna have much sleep between here and Aja," Pendexter said, when the trail boss was gone forward.

Cardigan surveyed the country from a rise when the water hole had been found and the cattle circled into position. The camp was settled down, but he was dubious. He knew perfectly well that somewhere along the route they might expect an attack from Contreras.

But there was only the utmost aridity all about them. From the little rise on which he sat his saddle, there was sand stretching in every direction, pink and mauve and purplish with the lowering sun; only, far to the northward, the low hills. By the following night those hills would be closer. He nodded, grim lipped, and turned back to the camp.

Everyone was desperately weary. But Pendexter and his scouts, true to the former's promise, found little rest.

The herd was restive, uncertain. Men circled about it warily. The songs of the outriders floated on the breathless air. Pendexter and his men took up watching points a good distance from the camp, so as to have some chance of warding off an attack before it got close enough to alarm the cattle.

But nothing happened; and the following morning the dusty, weary ride was commenced again. This was the day, Cardigan told himself. He knew Contreras well enough to know the bandit's methods. The country into which they drove invited attack.

A sharp watch was kept all morning. By noon the drive was under the edges of the hills. It was shortly afterward, as Cardigan was riding in to meet Carewe, that a lone rider appeared out of the ridges above them.

Carewe halted in his tracks. Cardigan stiffened—but the man was alone. There was something familiar about the way he rode. The others had seen, too. As the man approached, making straight for Cardigan, of a sudden, Carewe, with a curse, struck in his spurs and tore toward them.

But he was too late. Cardigan started when he recognized the approaching rider. It was one of the men he had met at Dick Croker's camp—the breed, Toros!

Toros rode directly up to him, spurring a little when he saw Carewe endeavoring to come up. There was no friendliness in his manner, but neither was there sign of hostility—except in his eyes.

"I do not want to come, but Dick send me. A message—for you. Ride away from here, señor—or die!"

That was all. Before Cardigan could answer, Toros had whirled his pony and was riding off the way he had come. Carewe swept up, red-faced and sweating.

"Who was that?" he demanded accusingly.

Cardigan kept on riding. He looked calmly at his questioner. "A man," he said, "with a message for me. He delivered it."

"A message—in this country?" Carewe snarled. "Cardigan, yo're jest what I figured—"

"I'm working for Pendexter, the same as you," Cardigan cut in, his voice like ice. "I wouldn't say the rest of what you've got on your mind, Carewe. Unless you've got some fool idea that I'll swallow bad talk!"

Carewe gulped down what he had been about to say. But his eyes flamed with suspicion.

"I don't trust yuh, Cardigan. They's something not right in this business."

"Pendexter trusts me," was the dry re-

tort. "That's all you have to know, Carewe."

He rode back toward the tail of the herd. Carewe had been riding out to relieve him as flanking point, which position he had maintained all during the hot morning hours.

Riding past Borden, he knew that Toros' visit had been observed by everyone. The trail boss shot him a swift, suspicious look, but said nothing.

When he reached Pendexter, the scout said nothing. But Cardigan was aware of his questioning look. For one instant the deep-seeking eyes searched his face; for one instant Cardigan's eyes met them. That was all. Ahead, the riders seemed milling their charges to a halt.

"There's a hole in here," Pendexter said. "Heard rumors that the next one is dry, and them cows'd stampede for this one, anyway. We're stoppin' for a minute."

Cardigan hesitated. "I think we can look for trouble to-night—pretty sure," he said at last, when they drew up.

"Sure of it?" Again that swift, searching look.

Cardigan did not meet it. "Yeah. Don't it look like the place for it?" he asked laconically.

That was all. It was all that Pendexter asked of him. But oddly enough, the scout seemed reassured.

When, at the end of a long, hot day, they reached their specified halting place, they found the shallow water hole almost dry. There was barely enough for the shaken, overworked horses. Only two of these drank, though, before the cattle, an angry, charging mass, swept down and obliterated the last trace of moisture. It was with difficulty that they were herded together for the night.

Pendexter looked at the stars and then at the low mound of hills bulking above their camp. They had chosen a halting place less flat and arid than the former ones. At the base of the hills, the ground was far from level and seriously cut up. The cattle moved about restively. In their movement was a nervousness that made itself felt all through the camp.

Everyone knew that this was the logical point for an attack, if any attack was to be made. There were curious, questioning stares as Cardigan moved about alone. And then he had disappeared.

"Jest walked away. Too danged much mystery about this drive, Walt. Sure o' that new man o' your'n?" asked Borden.

"Watch yore own men, *amigo*," Pendexter returned easily. "I know enough to look for trouble to-night, and I know it's comin'. Sleep with gunbelts on—if yuh sleep!"

Carewe had disappeared, too. Carewe was slipping, silent as an Indian, behind a dark, tall figure that crouched outside the camp, moving from rock to rock and gully to gully, until it was lost for an instant on a higher spur that hung over a V-shaped ravine. Carewe came closer.

For an instant he could not make out the figure. Then he thought he saw a man flattened on the edge of the spur. The apparition moved; the fitful light gave little clue. Carewe moved forward, inch by inch, cautious, his eyes narrowed with suspicion.

Suddenly there was a low voice in his right ear; and with it a ring of cold steel pressed against the back of his head.

"Better not move, *amigo!*"

A deft hand flipped the guns from his belt. The man was on his knees beside him.

"Now you can look up. Ah! Just what I thought. What's the idea, Carewe?"

The prisoner glared up at Cardigan. "Idea? In me followin' you? To see what yo're skulking about, of course!"

Cardigan considered for a moment. "Maybe. I haven't got much time, anyhow, so I'll show you what I was skulking for. Get down and listen—to something beside me!"

They flattened together, in silence. For a moment all the hills were still. There was only the faint sound of stirring in the camp behind them. Then metal clinked, the soft sound born down on the faintest of breezes. It was that sound that can never quite be given a name—moving horsemen over soft terrain.

Carewe started up and met Cardigan's eyes.

"It's them!"

"*Seguro!* Who would it be? Now take your guns and get back into camp—fast! If I know their methods, they'll be coming on a run just as soon as they get near enough. I'll try to give 'em a few pieces of lead here until the boys down there get in shape to take 'em on. Hurry up!"

Carewe knew enough to obey. He sensed that Cardigan knew this situation well. He felt his guns shoved back into his hands; and then, at the other's peremptory gesture, started back running. Cardigan resumed his position.

For a moment, after Carewe's running footsteps had gone from hearing, there was the same silence again. Then came the sound of horses, more distinct than before. The raiders were closing in toward the camp, and they were coming toward the ravine in a body. Cardigan waited grimly. His two guns lay on the rock shelf before him, along with his cartridge belt, full.

There was no moon as yet. Nearer and nearer came the raiders. He could hear them distinctly now.

They halted. Cardigan's features set. He picked up the guns and trained them on the ravine.

Then came a swift command, and waiting was ended. Caution was forgotten. A quirt came down across a mount's flank, steel hoofs struck on stone—and the raiders were riding for the gully.

Cardigan saw the first dim shapes appear. They got within range, riding hard, cursing, laughing. He opened up.

Both guns spoke at once, a steady stream of six shots—three from each. At the very first cartridge a man reeled, screaming with pain and startled fear. Behind him, a second man came down like a plummet, clear of his saddle, and tangled in the hoofs of the horse behind him. A horse screamed with pain—there was no missing that surging mass.

The rush stopped. Two more bullets from either gun! They were milling about down there in awful confusion—twenty or more of them. Cardigan fumbled to reload. A man spurred his mount for the shelf on which Cardigan lay. A bullet whistled over his head.

"They's only one of him!" cried a voice.

"Come on! We'll get him later!"

"The hell yuh say—now!"

Another mount reared up that precipitous ascent. Cardigan's guns were partially loaded again. Ignoring the two charging for him, he sent two more shots down into the struggling mass beneath him, and saw a man slide from the saddle. There was confusion down there, now, and for a moment it looked hopeless.

Then a horse topped the rise. Cardigan looked for an instant into the red-belching mouth of a six-gun. But he was not a distinct enough target. His own gun spoke, and the man went tumbling backward into the ravine.

The second rider gained the top. Three guns spoke together—again! Then, without a sound, the second attacker went tumbling back the way he had come.

"Get that *jibaro!*" came Contreras' fearful voice. "Get him—quick!"

"Don't give him time to reload!"

Out of the churning confusion in the ravine, four horses swung clear. Cardigan thought of his emptied chambers. No chance to fill them all now—about two or three shots left. He dropped back grimly. He knew what Contreras knew, that they had to get him at once, before order could be brought out of the confusion he had created in the ravine.

They started. Cardigan slung his belt over his arm and started to back down the other side of the slope. Before the riders had gained the crest of the hill, he had slipped two cartridges into his guns.

CHAPTER VII

In Contreras' Camp

ABOUT four shots now—there might be five; he could not remember, but he would not count on more than four. Four riders, shifting figures on horseback in the moonless night. No, they'd get him first. But Cardigan had never yet been beaten, and so he did not consider that

he was lost. It would have done little good. There would be no mercy shown here.

The first man gained the crest. Cardigan chanced it and fired. He missed and swore softly. Two shots came at him, but he was still somewhat safe in shadow.

The rider came on. Behind him, another cleared the ridge.

And then—suddenly and with no warning—a perfect hail of rifle fire shattered the night. There was a blinding sheet of it at the mouth of the gully. On the heels of it came the wild cowboy yell—*"Yip—yip—yip—eeeee!"*

"At 'em—they're all here!"

It was Pendexter's voice, carrying above the conflict, above the yells of mortally wounded men and screaming, hurt horses. Another sheet of fire!

The second man up to the ridge toppled backward with his hands flung to the dark heavens. The first turned, undecided, set his mount toward Cardigan. Cardigan threw up his gun and brought him tumbling from the saddle. Then he ran toward his first vantage point.

The raiders were scattered. They knew not how many men faced them—they only knew that they were broken and in a trap. Those who could, turned their mounts and ran. Others ran on foot, struggling after plunging, screaming ponies. A holocaust of lead swept after them.

"Cardigan!"

As the raiders swept past, Cardigan stood up and raised his hand. "Here, Pendexter!"

He made out the forms of many men afoot in the mouth of the ravine. It seemed more than the slender trail crew. He saw them start to their feet, glimpsed Pendexter's tall form.

"Caballero—is right!" someone swore.

Cardigan went sliding down the slope. A yell greeted him. Pendexter stalked toward him, holding out his hand.

"Great work, boy—you did it!"

Then Cardigan saw what justified his first surprise. There were more than the trail crew there. The original number had been joined by at least seven or eight more men. And Pendexter, knowing what Cardigan was doing there on the shelf—knowing that it was doom to leave him there alone—had taken the initiative and left the camp, to stage the battle here. It was the only thing that had saved Cardigan.

There was a chorus of acclaim for Cardigan. None of the trail crew had been injured, nor the scouts. They all walked back slowly together. The cowboys were in an exhuberant mood. The cattle, still nervous, had been spared the firing at close range, which would surely have stampeded them.

"Seven o' Ragnan's men came in—jest before yuh started shootin'," Pendexter explained, and his voice grew measured and grave. "Whose gang was that?"

"Contreras'."

Pendexter hesitated. The others sobered, too, from their first exhilaration, when camp was reached again.

"It was Contreras who kidnaped Ragnan's kid!" the scout said.

Cardigan was dumbfounded.

The others nodded. Speech was difficult. Cardigan could guess what they were thinking. No one who knew him could have helped adoring Jeff Ragnan, junior.

"Yesterday," Pendexter explained, at Cardigan's surprised questioning, while Borden assented with a glum nod.

"I'm sure glad we got plenty of 'em to-night!" he exploded.

"That's why Jeff sent on this gang," Pendexter went on. "Figured it was sure they'd tackle us after that. Contreras has started—jest like we figured he would."

Cardigan stood rigid. For some reason, they were all watching him. Suddenly he swung around toward where his mount stood. He started off.

"Hey! Where yuh goin'?" Pendexter demanded.

"To get the kid," Cardigan flung back over his shoulder.

They all stared. Finally the stares were fixed upon Pendexter. Cardigan was saddling. A moment later, Diablo, alone, was headed out toward the ravine where the battle had been.

Pendexter shook his head. "Search me," he declared. "They's only one thing I am sure of—if any man can do it, that Caballero Cardigan can!"

Cardigan took his way unheeding. He rode calmly through the dark ravine which only a little time before had seen so much of blood and violence. There were plenty of signs of it still. But if there were wounded outlaws there, they were silent as he passed through, grim as a stalking shadow of fate.

He came out at the farther side. The trail of the retreat was easy to follow. Once he passed a horse that had died under its burden.

He kept on. The moon arose finally. It lay bare the bleached, uneven country through which the trail led. He thought he had a good idea of the location of Contreras' headquarters on this side of the Border; and the tracks did not belie his suspicions. If he knew that he faced the deadliest danger in Contreras' camp, his calm features gave no sign of it. He might have been riding to a moonlight rendezvous with Dolores.

He kept on steadily, never at a gallop, following an easy trot all the way, up and down hill, through gullies, over ridges and occasionally he crossed shallow water courses. The moon fell back and was gone, and dawn stirred the east. He was weary, but he did not know it.

Then the skies were pink and vermilion and a new light suffused the broken country. Cardigan rode much higher above sea level now than when he had started out. Diablo was weary.

A few mists still hung wisplike across the rock faces ahead of him. Then the last of them vanished—the black mouth of a draw appeared—and Cardigan was upon the outlaw camp.

A lone figure rose up from behind a rock, and the early sunlight glinted on a rifle barrel.

"Halt!"

He rode on. The rifle came up uncertainly. But Cardigan was alone and there was nothing hostile in his demeanor. He halted before the Mexican and found the rifle covering him.

"Take me to Contreras," he ordered calmly, in Spanish.

"Who are you?" The man was staring suspiciously, at a loss.

"Don't you know — Caballero Cardigan?"

There was a gasp. The brown finger trembled on the trigger. Then the sentinel grinned.

"*Si,* Caballero—*Vamos*—we go!"

There was deep menace in that grin, and in the ready acquiescence. Cardigan smiled, for he knew that Contreras would much prefer one of his men shooting him and having it over with. He was banking on that. Contreras was not anxious to meet him alive.

The two went into the draw. Men lay in the open, about cold fires. One or two arose and stared as they passed, walking toward the single shelter tent that the camp boasted. The boots of Manuel Contreras protruded from here and they halted.

"Señor!" called the guard, softly and respectfully. "Señor! Caballero Cardigan is here!"

There came a violent oath, in Spanish. Contreras fairly bounded from his blankets, his shirt off, his hair tangled, eyes red and glowering. He brought up on his feet and stared in disbelief at the visitor. The guard kept on grinning.

Contreras was not slender. He was frankly skinny. The flesh was tight across his bones and he seemed without muscle. But there was about him the suggestion of the kind of strength that might be in a volted wire. Cardigan dropped without a suggestion of alarm from his saddle.

"*Como esta?*" he murmured lazily. "I have ridden a long way. Will you tell this *guapo* to take care of my horse?"

The guard scowled. Contreras scowled also—seemed about to say something—then jerked his hand to the man. He growled a low command; and the fellow, grasping Diablo's bridle, went off.

"Why have you come here, Cardigan?" the bandit chief demanded menacingly.

Cardigan shrugged. His carelessness was disconcerting. He might have ridden in with an army at his back.

"I want to talk to you," he said. "Sit down."

He had taken command of the situation from the first, which placed Contreras at a disadvantage. Contreras obeyed him, and Cardigan, squatting, commenced to roll a cigarette. The news of his coming had gone through the camp; and he was aware that the tent was being watched.

He made Contreras ask him his business again, and then he smiled engagingly.

"Why shouldn't I come here? I thought we were friends, Manuel?" he murmured. *"No es verdad?"*

"Friends! After last night?"

Cardigan feigned slight surprise. "So that was you! I wondered, when I saw some dead men along the trail, and horses. It was nothing, Manuel—nothing personal, that is. I was only doing my job, helping to defend those cattle. I'm paid for that, you see."

He met Contreras' eyes. For an instant their glances locked. He knew the bandit was baffled. Then the carelessness faded from Cardigan's face.

"Since when has kidnaping become part of the game, Manuel?" he shot out.

The breath hissed through the bandit's teeth.

"So that's it! As you said, it is nothing—personal—*mi caballero!*"

"Personal enough!" Cardigan let the smoke sift idly through his nostrils. "You can't do it, Manuel. I came to take the kid back with me!"

"You—!" Amazement made Contreras crouch backward. He stared, unable to find words.

Cardigan went on easily. "Exactly. I'm going to take him back with me. Maybe you didn't know it, but San Miguel's my home. If you want to fight me, it's your affair. I shan't fight you unless you get in my way. But if I go out of here alive, it's with that kid. And if I don't—" He shrugged. "I think you know how I stand down in Mexico, Manuel. You'll never dare go back there again if you finish me. You won't even dare stay here. Lobo Garcia will have a young army up here to wipe you out within the week!"

"You threaten me?" Contreras said, through tight lips.

"Call it what you like. Is any part of it untrue?"

Cardigan suddenly leaned forward. "There's the dope, Manuel—take it or leave it! Afterward—do what you please. Neither I nor my men will ever come up against you if you leave me alone. I promise that! If you say no—well, all your men aren't here. You'll have to either kill me before I leave, or I'll let my pack loose on your crowd in Mexico first and then have 'em up here after you. It's the same, either way—because if you do kill me, the whole Southwest country won't be big enough to hold you!"

He got up and flipped away his cigarette. Contreras stared at him a moment more—then got to his feet with a laugh.

"Bueno! You are too brave, *amigo mio*—you win!" He called one of the loiterers nearby and gave rapid orders. "You may take the boy—I only took him to strike fear at them, anyway."

He faced his nonchalant guest. "But you, Caballero. I do not ask promises from you, though I know all you say is true. I fight—San Miguel. That valley shall be mine. I shall make them quiver at my name—until I have wiped out every ranch that dares oppose me, and until I have squeezed it dry of everything. After you are back there, I shall come to get you. Remember that!"

Cardigan nodded laconic acceptance. "Fair enough," he agreed. "I'll be waiting. If you take my advice, though, you'll look for other worlds to conquer!"

"Bah!— Because I was beaten off last night? That is nothing. Get out yourself, Caballero—if you don't, I come after you along wit' the rest!"

He turned. Cardigan smiled. Leading a pony, young Jeff Ragnan appeared from behind the tent. He looked completely unafraid; but he gave a glad cry at sight of Cardigan. Cardigan put out his hand and the boy grabbed it eagerly in both his own.

"I figured somebody'd come along," he said simply. "I'm glad it was you!"

"So am I. Let's start ridin', son," Car-

digan returned. "Manuel, *adios* — and *hasta la vista!*"

"Hasta la vista!"

Manuel Contreras' scarred visage wore a confident, lurking smile.

CHAPTER VIII

An Excellent Prophet!

ONCE free of Contreras' camp, Cardigan shot a swift look over his shoulder and turned to the boy.

"Ride—and ride hard!" he commanded.

He knew that if an opportunity offered, Contreras would attempt to waylay him along the trail. The boy responded with that quick comprehension he had. Diablo was somewhat wearied, but he sensed his master's need. The two horses plunged side by side through the serried hills for the open country, at a dangerous pace.

Once a far-off shot whined through the air; but the sharpshooter had not the range. Cardigan doubted if the bandit would set men in pursuit.

This proved to be true. The two reached the ravine where the fight had taken place, late in the afternoon. The dead had been removed by someone. The horses had been left to rot there, but there was no sign of the men.

"Where to now?" young Ragnan demanded, when Cardigan had told him the story of the fight.

"I think we can catch up with the drive if we keep on riding," Cardigan said thoughtfully. "They're moving slowly. I'd like to send someone south with a message. Afterward, I'll go back to San Miguel. Do you want to start off now?"

"I'll stick with you," the youngster said firmly.

"Good enough. Let's go."

They caught up with the drive before midnight, where it had halted beside a fresh water hole only a few hours out of the rail junction which was its destination. It would take most of the following day to drive the cattle into place. Ragnan's riders had left and returned to the Flying R; but the others stared at the apparition of Cardigan and the boy.

They failed to understand, and Cardigan granted them small enlightenment.

"He jest came in and said he was there to take me away with him!" Jeff Ragnan said proudly. "That's all I know. We went."

Cardigan walked away, accompanied by Pendexter, and halted where Carewe sat alone. Carewe looked up guiltily.

"I reckon yuh got cause to laugh at me, Cardigan," he said. "I'm sure sorry I misjudged yuh—"

"No need to be," interrupted Cardigan briefly. "You couldn't trust me, but I think I can trust you. Will you take a job on?" he asked, at the same time looking at Pendexter for permission to give an order to one of the trail crew.

"Sure thing!" answered Carewe, noting Pendexter's nod.

"Good! Strike straight south from here across the line. Hit for the town of Matanzas and then ask for the Rancho Puesta del Sol. See Lobo Garcia, my foreman, and tell him I want him up here. Tell him not to bring any men into San Miguel, but to have 'em within call —and get to me as fast as he can! Got it?"

Carewe got to his feet. "Plenty!" he agreed. "I don't savvy; but this time, yore word's good. Shall I start?"

"Right away," Pendexter said.

The rider hurried off. Cardigan was alone with his employer. "I'm going to trail back to San Miguel with the kid," he announced. "Things are going to start happening right soon."

"I hope I'm back for 'em. I'll be starting to-morrow night," the scout said. "Contreras?"

"Yes. He's counting on Dick Croker joining him. I get their idea now, from what Contreras said. I offered to leave him alone if he didn't buck us in San Miguel. He laughed. He'll be there. He wants to make that valley so completely scared of him that it won't dare resist him. He'll get to where he can swagger by daylight right through the main street, he thinks, and then, sooner or later, he'll be boss of the district—rustling, killing, hold-ups — whatever he pleases, and no one to stop him!"

"It's been done before," Pendexter nodded, with a reminiscent sigh. "Stop 'em!"

"I intend to," Cardigan returned, with a grim smile. "Didn't I tell you—San Miguel's going to be my home?"

"I'm with yuh, son." Pendexter put out his hand. "I'll ride hell-for-leather to be back alongside yuh, jest as soon as this drive's finished. Good luck. *Vaya con Dios!*"

Cardigan slept for an hour; and then while the rest of the camp was in slumber, he and young Ragnan started out. It was a long trail, under the stars; but short, after the slow moving of the cattle, which took three days to cover the distance a man on horseback could in one.

Both Cardigan's mount and his companion's were worn, though, and they could not push on as rapidly as they might have otherwise. They rested in the heat of the following midday, until the sun was well worn toward the horizon. Then they started on again; but it was close to noon before, after circling about San Miguel, the outbuildings and corrals of the Lazy R came in sight.

They passed riders who whooped with glee at the sight of young Jeff; others rode on at a faster pace than the two travel-worn horses could go, bearing the news to the ranch house. So that when they appeared, the matronly figure of Ragnan's wife was hurrying down the trail toward them.

Tears streamed unashamed down the worn features of young Jeff's mother. Before the boy could slide out of his saddle, she had caught him and was clinging to him. Happy sobs made incoherent a medley of meaningless words. Cardigan turned and rode off a little way. The men eyed him curiously; but there was no hostility in their manner now.

Without warning, his free hand was suddenly caught, and he drew it away as though stung at the touch of a woman's lips. "I'll never forget you, Mr. Cardigan—never—for this!" Mrs. Ragnan exclaimed passionately. "This place is yours—no matter what anyone has to say about you!"

Cardigan was embarrassed. He had wanted to get the boy safely home and not leave him; but he really had not known whether to expect a respectful hostility or not. He smiled at young Jeff, whose eyes were not quite clear.

"It wasn't anything, ma'am," Cardigan assured her. "Jeff and I just had a nice long ride, that's all. I imagine he'll need some feeding up, though!"

"You both will! You jest come right inside, Mister Cardigan, and get some real food. Jeff's down to town—they's things happenin', they say. I'll—"

"I'm sorry, but I'm getting on down to town, too," he objected. "I've got an idea what's happening, and I maybe can be useful down there. Can I put off the meal till this is over, Mrs. Ragnan?"

"If you must," she agreed, obviously disappointed. But she knew what dangerous work meant for men in this country; she was of its breed. "Even if you and Jeff ain't friends, though, don't forget to come back. Young Jeff'll want to see you."

"I'll promise," Cardigan smiled; and with a toss of his hand to the boy, turned his mount and rode off.

He thought that he had squared his father's debt with Jeff Ragnan.

Now there were other things to be done. Contreras would not have been inactive. Certainly the bandit had had something in mind at his camp. It was time to strike. Cardigan wondered if Dick Croker had made a move yet. Mrs. Ragnan's words had convinced him that the town was alive to some real danger.

He wondered anew at the identity of the lone bushwhacker he had killed near the Flying R on his return from Dick Croker's camp. Certainly it had not been one of Dick's men—he knew the young outlaw better than that. And certainly not sent there by Ragnan; it was not Ragnan's way.

Toward sundown, he was entering San Miguel again. He rode slowly, conscious that more than the usual number of ponies occupied the hitch-racks along the main street. There were several buckboards in town, too. He struck for the Corona.

Dismounting somewhat wearily, he called to a boy who lounged near the doorway, and arranged to have Diablo cared for and fed. Then he strode into the saloon, anxious to face whatever San Miguel had in store for him.

They might almost have been waiting for his appearance. The bar was crowded, and men were gathered in separate little knots. They were serious groups, though, and there was nothing festive about the scene. When Cardigan halted, just inside the doorway, he found himself the cynosure of all eyes. Talk stopped.

Quickly he picked out first—Jeff Ragnan. Nearby stood the man Loughran, and also Croogan, the sheriff. There were one or two other faces he had seen on that first day. No one had any particular friendliness written on his face; but on the other hand there was not the outspoken hostility that Cardigan remembered.

Ragnan straightened, misery in his eyes, as Cardigan crossed the room. He searched the newcomer's face. Cardigan halted facing him.

"You—they said yuh went to get the kid, Cardigan. Yo're back. Is he—?"

"I left him at the house, Ragnan," Cardigan answered. "Right side up and safe."

A gasp of astonishment went around the group that heard the low words. Ragnan stared. For a long moment he was left speechless, like a man in a trance. His fingers moved bewilderedly. Cardigan heard a laugh at his left shoulder.

"Contreras give yuh an escort back, Cardigan?"

He faced Loughran. "Just what do you mean by that?" he asked coolly.

"Why, jest what's on the face of it," Loughran returned. "I reckon anybody must be a pretty good friend o' Contreras to walk right into his camp alone and come out thataway. It don't seem like any deep puzzle to me!"

Loughran was speaking for the benefit of all who were within range of his voice, and the voice was not low. Cardigan could sense in the way the nearest men shifted that his enemy had scored.

He started to speak when Croogan's voice broke in, more mildly—

"There must be an answer, I reckon," the sheriff said. "How'd yuh do it, Cardigan?"

Cardigan met his eyes. "I told Contreras I wouldn't fight him—in exchange for turning over the kid."

Another quick gasp. They stared at this cool-voiced youth who had outfaced the bandit. Alone! He had said he wouldn't fight Contreras, when Contreras could have had him put to death then and there. Cardigan realized how that sounded.

"It isn't just me, you see," he told Croogan. "I've got men—across the Border. If Contreras had shot me up that day, in his camp, he'd never have dared go near Matanzas again, unless he wanted to face a young war."

Loughran laughed. "Men across the Border?" he repeated. "I reckon yuh know yuh've got some on this side, too!"

"What?" Cardigan whirled.

"Ever hear o' Lobo Garcia—Mex badman—wanted—all that?"

"He's foreman of my ranch—and a friend of mine," Cardigan answered between his teeth. "I don't allow much to be said about my friends. Where's Garcia?"

"He was here," Croogan put in. "Lookin' for yuh, to-night. And one of the Lazy H boys said there was a camp o' Mexes over by Cottonwood Creek!"

Croogan ended his statement with an inflection in his voice that meant it was a question. Loughran was sneering. For just a flickering second Cardigan wondered at the intensity of the man's enmity. The others drew in closer. Ragnan was standing with bowed head; he seemingly had heard nothing of the talk.

"Yeah—what's yore friends movin' in here for, Cardigan?" asked a small, earnest-looking little man.

"To help you!" Cardigan suddenly whirled on the crowd, his eyes angry. "Contreras is on one side of us, and Dick Croker's on the other. When they've got themselves all set, it'll be too late. If you're going to clean San Miguel Valley,

you've got to tackle those two separately —and do the attacking before they get ready! That's why my men are here; they know how to fight Contreras! I sent word to 'em to come, hoping that you hombres would stop acting like school children and listen to reason!"

The scorn in his voice stung them. He was patently contemptuous of them. He —supposedly an outlaw from this town— had imported his own crowd from across the Border in order to do what they were hesitating to do. Few cowards in that crowd, even though they were hesitant —and Cardigan's words were like a lash to them. Someone grunted, and there was a low, angry murmur.

Suddenly a mighty fist crashed on the edge of the bar. The glasses rattled. There was a curse. Jeff Ragnan had straightened.

"By Glory, yo're right—and what yuh say is goin' to go with me, from now on!" the ranchman exclaimed. "Take the lead, Cardigan. And right now, take my hand and know that Jeff Ragnan's yore friend as long as yuh live!"

Cardigan had scarcely extended his hand before another voice broke in—

"And so am I!"

Limping on a gnarled cane, Joe Stevens came hobbling across from the door, one of his men behind him. He took Cardigan's hand and then turned to Ragnan.

"I'm sure glad to see yo're gettin' a little sense in yore cantankerous old age, Jeff. I was afraid I'd have to learn yuh some."

Ragnan swung on the others. "And how about you boys?" he demanded belligerently. "I've said that Cardigan's my friend. Has he got any enemies here?"

Loughran's eyes glittered. "They ain't never been enemies, Jeff," he put in. "It's jest that I ain't sure enough of any stranger to let him take charge o' things and go runnin' my guns and my life—on his own say-so!"

It was a cleverly calculated speech for that moment. Cardigan understood it. But he broke into the momentary silence.

"I don't care about running anything," he said. "I'll run my own men, if they're here—that's all. As for the rest—I told Contreras I wouldn't buck him, if he'd leave me and San Miguel alone. There's Croker's gang, though, too; and I know Croker, if that means anything to you all. You can take or leave what I've got to say. But if you want my advice—get them before they get together and get you!"

"You think Contreras'll come here again, then?" asked the quiet-voiced cowman who had spoken before.

Cardigan laughed. "I'll promise it!"

"*Verdad!* You are the excellent prophet, Señor Caballero!"

The voice startled them all to a fixed rigidity. Cardigan knew it well. In spite of his cool nerve, he felt something shudder along his spine at the words that came from behind him. Contreras was there— and in that position, he could drill any man he chose before the man could move.

Slowly Cardigan turned. The others turned, too, with him. Loughran had disappeared; no one noticed. But there had been such a calm authority in Contreras' voice that no man was foolish enough to reach toward a gun before he faced him.

The bandit was in the doorway. Flanking him were two men, but none of the three had drawn a revolver. At two of the three windows were other ugly faces —grinning over the crowd. Seven men in all, Cardigan counted—all badmen, and they had the advantage of surprise. They could get the drop in an instant.

Contreras had planned well. He moved into the bar, toward the group about Cardigan, swaggering with a lazy insolence, and halted a few feet from them—shooting distance!

"*Si,* an excellent prophet you have become, *amigo mio,*" he said to Cardigan. "As you see, I have releas' you from that promise which I did not ask for. I am here!"

Cardigan played for time. He wanted to know the best way to face this menace. He wanted to give his companions time to adjust themselves to it.

"I told you not to come here, Manuel,"

he said softly. His tone was that of a teacher reproving a recalcitrant pupil. "What's the idea?"

"Idea? Why, to see my old friend Caballero Cardigan!" Contreras laughed. "Did I not tell you I would come when you leave my camp, two—t'ree days ago?" He opened his hands. "See? You can see I am the friend. I have not drawn a gun, even when I know that they do not like me here."

His laugh was a menace. In the insolent words, he was only taunting the helpless rangeman. Taunting them to draw—so careless and sure of himself that he had walked in here without bothering to pull a gun on them. A clever gesture; but bad business, just the same, thought Cardigan—even while he admired the bandit's cool nerve.

CHAPTER IX

Wiped Out

FOR a moment the tense silence held. Men stood leashed—both sides—filled with the knowledge that at any second the crash of gunfire and thudding of bullets would commence. Knowing that the slightest move of any man was enough to precipitate it.

Cardigan straightened slowly. His long legs were placed widely apart. Facing it this way, he wanted it over. No good to try bluffing it out; he saw that. Contreras had come for business.

"Get out, Manuel!" he commanded, his voice low but hard. "Get out of here and out of San Miguel—or I'll plant you personally!"

It was enough. Cardigan had known it would be. He was sufficiently grateful that his low-voiced challenge had been able to voice the warning to his friends—for he knew that, whether they recognized it or not, the ranchers were awaiting his move. The menacing note in his voice had not carried to the men at the windows.

But it was enough for Contreras. The bandit took an inadvertent step backward and in the same split second his hands moved downward toward the low-hung guns at his hips. His two companions moved away from him swiftly, their hands darting down in the same instant.

Cardigan swerved sidewise and a bullet splintered under his raised right arm and embedded itself in the bar behind him. His guns had been in his hands and speaking first.

Then suddenly other guns were crackling and spitting—smoke wreathed the yellow-lighted interior of the Corona. Through the smoke, stabs of yellow and red flame shattered. Men reeled—cried out involuntarily in agony. From the windows shots tore across the room.

Cardigan was aware that Contreras was down. Two shots had entered his chest; Cardigan had spaced them not far apart. The bandit had only fired once—that bullet that had grazed the man he hated.

Even as Cardigan's first shot had gone out, he had swung—certain of its mark—and his two weapons were spitting lead at the windows. He stood with his knees slightly bent, crouched forward, eyes blazing through the haze of powder smoke. He saw a man drop backward through the nearest window. His companion slumped.

But the other window. . .!

He whirled, held his fire just as two strange shots cracked from there. Through the wavering smoke, he saw a man drop forward across the sill—one of Contreras' two. The second was gone. But the shots had come from behind them!

He gasped. "Don't shoot—they're all down!" he yelled.

Contreras' two companions lay across his motionless body. They had fallen that way, grotesque, face down. But the face that Cardigan now glimpsed in the window opening was that of Lobo Garcia—and behind him two of the *vaqueros* from the Puesta del Sol.

The pistols along the bar flashed downward. In another second, Garcia might have been shot by one of that crowd. But all careless of that fact, he jumped lightly through the window and came—teeth flashing against his dark skin—across the room toward Cardigan.

"It is finish', Caballero—finish' for here!"

Cardigan looked about him. Contreras' men were cleaned out. But two of the punchers lay silent and motionless at the foot of the bar. Ragnan was bent over one of them. A third man, one of the ranchers, was fumbling with a scarlet handkerchief and attempting to tie up a jagged bullet wound in his left forearm. Two more stood vengefully in the doorway, looking up and down the street.

"Where'd you come from?" Cardigan demanded of Garcia.

"I started before your friend came for me." The Mexican looked troubled and defiant at once. "You tol' me to wait; but then I find Contreras has many men up here. They leave after you. So I get the men and I come—and meet this Carewe on the way."

"Where are the men?"

"By the creek. Only t'ree of us come here. I come this afternoon and I was made to wonder about you. Thes' men—" he surveyed the ranchmen belligerently—"they seem not friendly. So I think maybe you will need help when you come, and I watch."

Cardigan pressed his hand with a little grateful smile. "Did you see Contreras come?" he asked.

Garcia remembered. "*Carajo* — yes! He has all his men—they camp outside, to wait for him. We saw them come!"

"Contreras' gang is outside—waiting for him to come back?" Cardigan was staring fascinated at the still form of the bandit on the floor.

Garcia shrugged. "For what else they wait there—when he comes in with these alone?"

"Of course!" Cardigan calculated rapidly. Contreras' move was more clear now. He had figured on taking the saloon by surprise and denting any feeling of security that those in San Miguel might possess. Then, on the heels of his brief appearance, his men would sweep down and over the town—before Dick Croker could join with him!

Contreras would be the unquestioned boss, then. Cardigan started. The man's ideas had not been small, anyway. But they meant that Dick Croker was somewhere in the vicinity—still trusting Contreras and waiting for the word to strike!

"Now—if ever—is the time!" Cardigan said aloud.

Ragnan was at his side. "That looks like the end for Señor Contreras," he said.

"Yes—but not his gang!" Cardigan broke in; and rapidly he sketched what he knew and his deductions.

"Posse?" asked Croogan, hard-eyed and cool.

"Not for Contreras' outfit," Cardigan smiled; and Lobo Garcia permitted himself a wolfish grin. "This is as good a time as any for my men to close in with them. They've been waiting for it, for years. I'll take care of Contreras. Now, if—"

A voice broke in. "Hell! I knew I'd be too late! Caballero, where are yuh?"

Walt Pendexter strode through the clearing smoke-wreaths of the room. He found Cardigan; swept the others with his eyes, and nodded with satisfaction. He wore the air of a man bearing news, and halted before them, resting his rifle butt on the ground.

"Don't know what this is," he said abruptly, "but it looks like it's started. I trailed Cardigan in—and ran plumb into a young army out by the mesa!"

"By the mesa!" Cardigan echoed. "West of town?"

"Yeah. All hid up there pretty. Waitin' for somethin', I figgered—and somethin' that's due to happen to-night, or they wouldn't be holed up that close to San Miguel!"

Cardigan breathed softly. They were all watching him—even Walt Pendexter. He had taken charge; they knew him now.

"That'll be Wild Dick Croker's crowd," he said quietly. "We've got Contreras' outfit spotted on the other side. Contreras was figuring on beating Croker to it, even though they were supposed to be partners in this."

"Croker? Let's get him now, and have a lynchin' party!" one of the cowboys yelled.

They were all excited. The recent battle had taken its toll and warmed them up to the fighting pitch. They wanted to finish it now—to fight it out and exact their vengeance. Two bodies, of men they had been speaking with only a few minutes before, lay stretched before them still. The appeal was poignant.

Cardigan nodded slowly, his features expressionless. Now was the time, he knew, to finish the thing. The chances were more than good, with the men of San Miguel thus aroused. Dick would pay. Cardigan had warned him; but just the same he did not want to see it. He would have preferred to make Dick abdicate and run across the Border after he had broken the two gangs. But it was too late now.

"Garcia and I—we'll take care of Contreras' men," he said softly. "Round up a posse, Croogan—Pendexter'll lead you to where Croker's waiting. We've got 'em split up, and you can take Croker by surprise. We'll finish it to-night!"

A yell of approval split the air. Ragnan nodded. Croogan agreed.

"Everybody goin'?" he demanded.

Another yell shook the walls. Six-guns were fired into the ceiling. Men started from the saloon on a rush for the horses outside.

"Let's get Croker!"

"—And drag 'im through town at the end of a rope!" came vengefully from someone else.

They rushed for the door. Pendexter stood beside Cardigan. He looked into the younger man's eyes and seemed to understand.

Cardigan looked up. "He was a friend of mine, Walt," he said slowly. "Except for the trails we took, we were like brothers. Do you know Croker by sight?"

"I reckon I do. Seen him once, down in El Paso. He was jest beginnin' to run wild then."

Cardigan laid his hand on the elder's arm. "If you get a chance, put a bullet through him, before—before they get him alive, will you, Walt? He'll thank you—and so will I!"

The scout nodded. "If I get the chance, Caballero—I will," he promised quietly.

They moved to the door. Diablo had already been brought out to the front. He was saddled and ready. Cardigan mounted, and his two *vaqueros* fell in behind him. Garcia was at his side. While Croogan's posse was still milling about in disorder, these four started out.

But before the sheriff's office, Ragnan stopped them. He was standing on the step and he laid a hand on Cardigan's saddle horn.

"So long, Caballero," he said. "Lots o' luck. I don't know all that's goin' to happen to-night—but whatever it is, I reckon San Miguel's yore town from now on, if yuh like it enough. You've jest plumb shot yoreself into a place here!"

Cardigan grinned. "I'm glad I was shooting in the direction I wanted to," he said. "For a while, I was afraid. Luck, Ragnan—and adios!"

He rode on toward the edge of town, and respectful, stern glances followed him as he went.

Then they were out into the dark of the hills again. Garcia rode for a long time in sympathetic silence.

"They go to get Croker; no?" he said at last.

Cardigan nodded softly in reply; his hard eyes seemed seeking something in the starlit dark.

"They won't stop till they've strung him up, or plugged him, now," he said. "San Miguel's been pushed far enough, and it's turning from its corner. Somebody's got to pay plenty. . . . Just like my old man, Lobo. He never did a thing in San Miguel—but they were scared he would and they knew he had—other places. This time they'll make Dick pay if they have to chase him to Panama as food for that rope!"

Garcia looked at Cardigan, his eyes shining. "There is no way?" he murmured softly. "We could do something, *quicas*—perhaps—?"

Cardigan shot him a swift, stern look.

"If Dick could be helped, I'd do it," he said quickly. "He's finished, though. No! San Miguel's my home after to-night,

Lobo; and if Dick menaces my home, he's got to get out of the way like anyone else!"

Lobo Garcia shrugged philosophically. Cardigan's word was law and the subject was thus finished, so far as he was concerned. "I go wit' you," he said simply. "Wherever."

But Cardigan, stern as he was with a sense of justice, was not the man to let a friend face what Dick was facing tonight without regret. There simply was nothing he could do to aid his friend. Dick, he knew, would not want him to. Both of them were of the breed that will stand or fall by its own choice.

The quartet of silent riders came to where the open grassland sloped gently downward toward the pools that Cottonwood Creek made, in its meandering course southward. A moment later and a soft challenge came from beyond a blur of low bushes, and the faint, far-off starlight glinted along a rifle barrel. Garcia answered the muffled challenge with a low growl.

Presently Cardigan was in the camp of his own men; and they crowded eagerly about him, talking in low voices.

"How many of you?" Cardigan asked.

"All. Nearly as many as there are in Contreras' band. Twenty-five—twenty-six wit' you."

"*Bueno!* Let's ride. Contreras didn't camp far away?"

"A mile beyond that ridge, señor." Garcia pointed.

The men were already throwing saddles over the backs of their mounts, working with a quiet, smooth precision in the dark. They were eager for action. This was an old feud, this with Contreras and his men; and their blood was hot for it. Only Cardigan and Contreras himself, by a cold-minded truce, had kept this day of reckoning off for so long.

Cardigan might have preferred attacking on foot; it seemed the wiser plan. But he knew these men of his. They were born to the saddle. To swoop down upon an enemy thus meant everything to them. They fought madly, wildly—exultantly. There was no good in outlining a cold-blooded, careful plan to them. They simply wanted to fight!

The long cavalcade started off into the dark, trailing like a line of specters across the hills.

Nearing the Contreras camp, they commenced to spread out, at a word from Garcia. Somewhere in the night that pressed down upon the silent hills, a horse whinnied. Cardigan held his breath and pressed a warning palm over Diablo's nose. But one of his men was less careful. The whinny was answered—from behind him!

Garcia cursed. "Speed!" Cardigan commanded. "If they're awake at all, they'll know what that means."

"Perhaps they will think it is Contreras," Garcia whispered.

"They'll be awake, anyway. It's my guess they're just waiting for him to return. We'll go—"

"It is here, Caballero!"

Unconsciously the Puesta del Sol riders had pressed up close, knowing they were upon their destination. Cardigan found his men spread out like a fan as they came within a few paces of the summit of the ridge, riding fetlock-high in dewy grama grass.

A bit clinked, and in the dark there could be heard the strain of saddle leather. If there was anyone near. . . !

"*Que pasa?* It is you, *jefe?*"

Cardigan hesitated only a moment. He swept the line of his eager, straining men—like leashed hounds. Then—

"Your *jefe* is dead!" he answered harshly. "Out of the way, *jibaro. Mi' guapos—vamanos*—let's go!"

His men answered him with a wild, blood-curdling shriek. The horses swept to the summit of the rise. Two men—the one who had challenged and a companion—arose with thick curses out of the damp grass. Rifles glittered. But they were simply swept aside before the rush that came. The first one dropped with no less than five bullets in him. The second threw up his gun once to fire—missed—and went down with a bullet in his throat.

Then the battle was on.

Cardigan knew he would not be able

to restrain his men, once he released them upon their ancient enemies. In fact, he counted on their fierce madness to offset the superior force that Contreras had commanded. That—and the fact that the attack would be a complete surprise. Contreras' men were too confident; they were waiting only for their leader's return, when they would sweep down upon a supine cowtown.

And instead of that—came this holocaust!

The hollow holding the encampment was in an uproar instantly. Instinctively the bandits ran for their mounts. The ponies plunged about. The riders turned in every direction. While down the short slope tore that yelling, vengeful wave of horsemen.

There were the embers of a few low fires to guide the attackers. Men twisted and ran about before them, misshapen, unearthly forms in the dark. Revolver flashes crackled through the blackness.

Cardigan saw a man swing into the saddle of a rearing mount and attempt to ride off. He put Diablo across his course. A half second later, a six-gun bullet whistled past his ear. He brought his black to a sliding stop, drew far back in his saddle, and fired twice. As the fugitive's gun circled to cover him again, the lead struck home and the man fell forward and out of his saddle, tumbling to his head upon the ground.

Cardigan turned back. His men had overridden the outlaw camp in the first rush. They had turned and were coming back. A few of Contreras' men had managed to make a stand. These were bunched about the nearest fire. Rifles and six-guns gleamed.

Cardigan shot down a man who ran insanely toward his black mount. Then the *vaqueros,* with a wild, vengeful yell, swooped down upon the last clump that was making a stand.

Cardigan would have liked to stop it here, but it would have been no more possible than to stop the rising moon. He saw the men from Puesta del Sol ride like avenging demons, right over that knot of men.

Horses and men were one writhing, twisting mass. Cardigan's *vaqueros* were using knives now; so were the others. A horse went down screaming. He was part of the awful nightmare there. Faces could be seen at intervals in the red glare from a revolver flash—mad, twisted faces, full of fear or insanity.

For a moment guns barked a mad staccato. Shrieks of fear and yells of terror, curses and prayers, blended with wild shouts of vengeance and fury. There was the clash of steel, the smell of singed flesh, burnt powder, and blood. As Cardigan drew off from that last mad fury, it was a horrible thing to see.

Another horse went down. The furious firing ceased. One of Cardigan's men reeled from the saddle. A lone shot—then a kind of pulsing silence for a split second. A man reeled out from the mêlée—broken, staggering.

A laugh—a harsh laugh—and from the saddle a *vaquero* put two bullets into his back.

The fight was over. A few of Contreras' men had escaped, to make a precarious way to the Border. But the band was broken up and it would never again exist. Cardigan told himself that that fact was sufficient excuse for the savagery of the past few minutes.

CHAPTER X

On Croker's Trail

CARDIGAN'S men had lost three of their number in dead; and several others were suffering from bullet or knife wounds. Garcia had a smudge of blood across his scarred visage that made him look like a butcher, and he was binding up crudely a knife cut in his thigh.

They drew off, and Cardigan was grateful when they reached the crest of that bloody bowl again. The clean night air swept across desert and grassland, and it left the stench of blood and sweat and battle behind. Garcia drew up at his side. He could see Cardigan's pale, cold face and his eyes narrowed.

"You do not like this, eh?—this kind of fight, Caballero?" he asked.

"I don't like any kind of fighting, Lobo," was the quiet answer.

Garcia shook his head. "Yet all men know how grand the fighter you are. *Yo no se.* I do not understand," he sighed.

"I fight when I must. I hope to-night finishes it all, anyway," Cardigan said. His eyes were straining westward; the breeze was from that direction, and he listened for the sounds of firing. But none came. Was Dick finished, too, he wondered?

"What shall you do, Caballero?" Lobo said, after a long pause. "We stay here, first, to bury these." He jerked a thumb back toward the scene of the recent battle.

"Yes, do that. Then take the men back to Puesta del Sol. I'm going to look for Dick's body. Then I'll return. Afterward, I clear out of there. My home shall be here—a new ranch. We'll drive the stock across. All of these men can come with me, if they want to. You come?"

"*Seguro!*" the Mexican exclaimed. "But where else would I go—but wit' you, *amigo?*"

"Good!"

Cardigan hesitated. Garcia looked at him meaningly. "I start to round up when I get back; *no?* Then I wait for you—one, two days. Is that all, Caballero?"

"Go to Dolores. Tell her I am safe and that I'll be back for her, soon. That I've made a home. That's all. *Buenas noches, compadre!*"

"*Adiosita!*"

Cardigan rode slowly down the slope. The low lights of San Miguel gleamed distantly. This adventure was ending, just as he had intended it should; yet he was not exultant. He wondered about Dick Croker. . . .

He stared absently at the lights of the little town as he neared them. There was no need to hurry. The evening was still young; but by now, Dick was past any help he could give him—even if there ever had been any way to help Dick. What he had hoped in the very beginning was that, beating off Contreras, he might persuade his boyhood friend to clear out of this country. But it was too late for that now.

Suddenly the lights seemed brighter. Cardigan was quite close to the town now. He could see that the Corona had thrown open its wide doors. There were streams of illumination across the street. Wild, exuberant yells came to his ears, broken by the occasional bark of a six-gun fired into the air.

Cardigan lifted his reins and Diablo broke into a long, swinging lope that carried horse and rider past the outskirts in a few minutes. Once within sight of the Corona, Cardigan could see that the excitement was due entirely to a spirit of celebration. The posse had returned!

It was easy enough to see that the raid had been successful. Someone caught sight of Cardigan swinging down the street, and cheered. Guns barked vociferously. He was a hero! He smiled a little, not without bitterness, recalling his first entry into San Miguel.

Croogan was at his stirrup as he reined in and slid to the ground.

"All okay, Cardigan?" The others were silenced for his reply.

He nodded briefly. "They're wiped out. Most of 'em dead. There was no holding my gang—they'd been waiting to get at Contreras' men for years."

Another wild shout rent the night. Cardigan's name was cheered. He nodded to Ragnan, who clapped him on the back as he passed, and made his way to the door of the saloon. At entering, he caught sight of Pendexter standing against the bar. The scout shot him a meaning look, and Cardigan ranged to his side.

Neither spoke at once. Then Cardigan's eyes pleaded mutely for information.

"He's alive," Pendexter said. "I jest got in with the news. They're formin' a fresh posse, to scour the hills for him—they'll start in an hour or so."

"Alive! Can he—?"

"He's bad hit," Pendexter said, shaking his head. "Couldn't ride far. I trailed him, alone."

"You trailed him! Where—?"

Pendexter cut him off. He shot a swift look about the barroom.

"Yes, I know where he is. And they's two others with him. The posse don't know I got back yet—I slipped in when I see you comin' down the street. I'll give yuh fifteen minutes, Cardigan, if it's any good to yuh. In fifteen minutes, I'm goin' to tell Croogan where he is!"

Cardigan did not answer at once. He scarcely breathed. He knew, from Pendexter's words, that he could do little for Dick Croker now. If Dick was wounded that badly, he would not be able to make his way across the Border. Yet while there was the slimmest chance he did not want to forsake the man who had once been his friend and never his enemy, in spite of all.

He straightened suddenly. "Tell me," he said.

Pendexter outlined the way to Croker's halting place. It was in the rugged, cut-up hill country past where Cardigan had gone to meet him that first day. "I reckon you know trailin' well enough to follow them directions," Pendexter said.

Cardigan nodded, tight lipped. "Thanks, Walt," he said, and pressed the old man's hand. "I won't forget. *Adios!*"

He slipped out, edged around the crowd, and managed to pilot Diablo out of the farther side of town. Then he broke into a gallop and circled San Miguel, facing southwestward.

"Fifteen minutes start!"

He had no idea of what he wanted to do, but if he could help Dick Croker, he knew he must. It would harm no one. San Miguel was safe, the last menace erased, vengeance taken. Dick would only be a useless victim on the altar of hatred that Contreras had built in the valley.

He rode hard, and Diablo seemed to sense that there was need for this last effort. For a space, the open, sandy country unrolled beneath the horse's hoofs. Then the cool wind of the hills was in Cardigan's face. Frequently he looked back over his shoulder—it was a purely instinctive movement, for there was no moon and it would have been impossible to distinguish the posse behind him.

The posse was there, though, he knew. Fifteen minutes. It had long since passed. Once or twice Cardigan caught the sound of wild shots from his rear. The men of San Miguel were pressing on hard to their last slice of vengeance. If they could take Croker alive, his fate would be a warning to all others who would dare attempt to shatter the peace of the valley. Then San Miguel would quiet again and forget bloodshed. Cardigan knew the country; it was like that.

Someone had to pay, and it was just that payment should be made. These men riding behind him had been defending their homes, their lands and their families against marauders. Not a tithe more than just, that their vengeance should be swift and complete.

Cardigan pressed on fiercely, resenting his conflicting thoughts. San Miguel was his home, too—it would be Dolores'! He had fought for it; he had risked death more frequently in these past few days than any of the men behind him. It was his leadership which had crystallized the fight. They owed him this—that he be allowed to help his friend if it was possible.

Yet he would not ask for Dick's life. For one thing, it would never be granted him. No, Dick must stand or fall by his choices and his actions.

Probably Dick Croker did not know that he had been trailed. He probably thought that his hiding place would be safe enough for a stop overnight, and hoped that his wounds would enable him to travel southward in the morning. Perhaps, if he knew the danger, he would find the strength to go on, across the Border. There was sanctuary for him there.

Cardigan prayed that this might be so.

Diablo was struggling through the hilly and wooded country now. Going was difficult, but Cardigan followed his directions without hesitation. Again those far-off shots, but they seemed nearer now.

They spurred Cardigan on frantically. He had to ride low in his saddle to avoid the low hanging limbs all about him.

Brushwood clung to his legs and the pony plunged heavily through it. The going was harder now; but he was almost at his destination.

The way beyond here, he remembered, lay straight along this level shelf until it reached a low palisade of black rock. After that he would have to dismount and find the steep trail up to the cave on the shelf above where Croker was in hiding. Cardigan surveyed the ground as best he could, and recalled to himself that the posse would lose several men before that palisade could be scaled. An approach could not be made in silence, either.

He swung down from Diablo's back as the palisade reared up in the darkness, black, blank wall. The reins he flung over a juniper bush. From the blackness above him a challenge came.

"Who's that?—Stop!"

"Caballero Cardigan!" he called back, coolly. "Out of the way!"

He was at a loss to account for the soft curse that echoed his words, and the stunned silence following that. The men on the shelf seemed to be whispering. But no more was said to him.

He clambered painfully up the steep, narrow way. In the dark, this was a feat. There were broken, jagged rocks to cling to, precarious roots and treacherous levels. He could see nothing. He could only feel with his hands that suddenly he had reached the top.

He straightened, trying to accustom his eyes to the blank darkness. Somewhere ahead forms moved, but there was still no voice. Nothing except that first challenge. He sensed life stirring ahead of him, and instantly his perceptions were all alert. Something was wrong here!

He held his breath, waiting. He did not want to be the first to speak. And then he knew that, no matter what the cost, he must make a move. Fifteen minutes! The posse would not be far behind now.

"Dick!" he called. "Where are you?"

Instinct made him do as he did. As soon as he had spoken, he flung himself sidewise.

Just in time! From two points about three yards apart, six-guns spoke. Cardigan's guns were out in a flash. The lead had flattened on the rock behind him. Automatically, he let go at the points from which the flashes came.

"Yeah, you'll get to Dick Croker—in hell, maybe, damn yuh, Cardigan!"

Tick Murray's voice!

A figure leapt into brief outline. They thought him hit. Two of them! They swung toward him. Then the belch of flame and smoke blotted out a sudden pleading cry. Lead whistled through the air, clipped the close leaves.

But Cardigan was in the dark, crouched to the smallest possible target. The two figures loomed above him. Agile as a panther and as merciless, he was suddenly upon his feet. His two guns were at his hips. He had held his fire, after those first shots, for this moment.

Murray and Toros loomed out of the gloom. They saw him in the same instant that he straightened.

But Cardigan's guns spoke first. Four shots—two from each of those deadly forty-fours. There were three other shots, but two of them were wild, and a last one went into the sky.

With a thick curse, Tick Murray stumbled forward and Cardigan had to step aside as the big body crashed across his feet. Toros swayed, strove to bring up his gun again, partially leveled it. Cold-eyed, dangerous, Cardigan merely took another single shot from the hip and Toros fell across the lower part of his companion's body.

Cardigan waited for a moment. Then—

"Dick! Where are you?"

A faint, broken cry answered him. He started impulsively toward the shadows from which it had come. Even as he moved, something else crouched, moved in the shadows. He heard Dick Croker's voice—

"Look out, Ned, he'll—!"

Too late the warning came. Cardigan saw the flash—saw a figure rise up with a savage curse. Something burned fiercely through his thigh.

But with the first flash, another had

come, from the ground. The man who had fired upon Cardigan gave a little grunt even as his revolver spoke. He crashed forward. Cardigan fired again, pinning him to the ground. Then he started for Croker's voice.

He dropped beside a figure lying on the ground, half bolstered by the bottom of a rotted tree root. It was his friend. A pallid hand reached up toward him through the gloom.

"That's—all, Ned. Thank God, I had the strength enough to make that—last shot. It was—Loughran, waitin' for you!"

"Loughran!"

Cardigan started. Loughran, who tried to start the fight that first day in the saloon. Loughran, his enemy from the first. He thought suddenly of the ambush that day he left Dick Croker, and a flash of understanding came, even before Dick spoke.

"He was—with us. Working from the inside. His — outfit's been changing brands on a lot of the stuff we rustled in the past. 'Sall right. He's—done, now. Wanted to get you—first. They all did. Traitor, they said. But—I know, Ned. If I didn't before—I know—now!"

Cardigan felt him all over, swiftly, for wounds. "I came to try to get you out, Dick," he said rapidly. "The posse is right behind me. They know where you are—"

"Too late. Feel there, Ned. I'm finished. They were goin' to leave me here and run—until you came. They only waited to get you." As Croker halted, there was a bubble of red foam on his lips and a rattling cough in his throat. His grip on Cardigan's hand was tenacious.

"Funny, but—as it should be—you're the only one to be here holding my hand when the finish comes!" the boy said, and there was bitterness in his voice. "It's good—because I've got the chance to tell yuh—you were right and I was wrong, Ned. This proves it."

He coughed. Cardigan, racked with agony over his friend's pain, paid no heed to the sound in the brush below. The posse was coming up, but he knew it would be too late.

"Goin'—now, Ned. My—my best to Dolores, and—luck, on your trail. *Adios —amigo!*"

Dick Croker tried to raise up, to see his friend's eyes once more—and failed.

Cardigan held the limp body in his arms until he felt a touch on his shoulder. Pendexter, Ragnan and Croogan strode up, the others cursing with amazement over the fallen bodies. He looked up at them calmly.

Dawn was lighting in the east. A new dawn. Bloodshed was ended. The faces of the men were pale and stern in the faint light.

"You're too late," said Cardigan. "Everything's squared up at last!"

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OUT of the friendship of two great men has come the whole truth about the real Buffalo Bill. Captain Frank Winch and Colonel Cody fought and worked side by side. Frank was Colonel Cody's right-hand man and constant companion for years. Buffalo Bill told Frank facts that no one else has ever known, and gave Frank Winch permission to publish these facts later on.

WHEN Buffalo Bill would talk, Frank Winch listened, attentively. As soon as it was evident that Colonel Cody would tell no more for that time, Frank Winch would leave to write down what he had been told. In consequence, every bit of the story is as fresh as though Buffalo Bill were telling it to you himself.

COLONEL W. F. CODY

FRANK WINCH made it a point to show Buffalo Bill every one of his writings. Colonel Cody often remarked at the amazing ability displayed by Frank Winch to remember facts and whole conversations. Frank Winch learned every important thing. ACE-HIGH readers will have all that can ever be known about Buffalo Bill.

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TASCO BILL HOWLS AGAIN

By Ray Nafziger

A rip-roarin' old frontier sheriff shoots plumb p'izen hell out of the ghost town of Tasco.

IT was afternoon when a delegation of Plains City business men filed into the office of "Tasco Bill" Hartigan, sheriff of Valencia County. The delegation wore business suits, highly polished shoes; some of the members even sported white collars and all wore neckties.

Sheriff Tasco Bill Hartigan greeted them with a disgusted grunt. He sat in his chair, a bulky, granitelike lump of a man, with great wide shoulders. No tie disgraced the neck of his flannel shirt. A battered, rusty sombrero roosted on the back of his head. A pair of boots, run-down of heels, with rusty Mexican-roweled spurs were on his feet.

His grayish hair—Tasco Bill was over sixty—was worn long after the fashion of Buffalo Bill and other Indian scouts. He also wore a buckskin vest, embroidered, fringed, and very dirty. Tasco Bill, who had been raised in the saddle, and had slept more nights under the sky than under a roof, represented the frontier which still existed in remote parts of Valencia County; the business men represented the civilized part of the county.

"Sheriff," said the spokesman of the group, a man named Millard, who owned the Bon Ton Store, "we want to talk to you."

"Talk on ahead," growled Tasco Bill Hartigan. He was surly because he knew why these men had come to see him.

"Bill," said Millard in a tone intended to be soothing, "you've served Valencia County long and faithfully. But these times are getting a little too fast for a range-raised officer like you to hold down a sheriff's job. And you're getting a little too old."

"Too old!" burst out Tasco Bill as he got to his feet. "Hell's bells! Too old!" His guns fairly jumped from the skeleton holsters that hung at each hip. The business men pushed back toward the door, their faces suddenly drained of color.

There was a succession of dull roars from the big Colt forty-fives, but instead of perforating the delegation of business men, Tasco Bill was hurling lead through the open window at a tin can in the street. His guns were held hip high, the shooting was as fast as an automatic. The can rolled away until it was literally battered to pieces by Tasco Bill's shots.

"Git a young man whut can do that," snapped Tasco Bill.

"We realize, Bill," said Millard in a placative tone, "that you're a wizard with a pair of guns—no better gunfighter ever lived in the West. You stack up right along with Wild Bill and Bat Masterson and the rest. But, Bill, times have changed. You're one of the old cowboy sheriffs what was raised to trail thieves by the hoofprints of their horses. But nowadays a sheriff has to be able to catch criminals like this bandit gang that chases in and out of here in an auto. Last night was the fifth robbery in Plains City in six weeks. Bill, they're too slick for an old cowboy like you. Why not resign and just be a deputy? You could take it easy—just lay around and give advice."

"Yeah, give advice like you birds," grunted Tasco Bill. "Listen yere, yuh pale-faced, bottle-raised dogie runts! I was elected to this office, and I'm stickin'. I ain't done for yit. I may be only a old-time cowboy sheriff, but I can still knock down the horns of any six men in this town. I could lick the whole bunch of yuh single-handed. Me old! Hell's bells! Git outa yere before I lose muh temper."

The business men backed out hastily, realizing that Tasco Bill might get really dangerous. Some people said he had killed ten men in his life, some claimed at least eighteen. Everybody had heard stories since they were children of Tasco Bill Hartigan's shooting ruckuses. He was one of the most famous of old frontier sheriffs, of the two-gun, fast-shooting, hard-riding crew who had tamed the wild old Western town.

In his younger days, Tasco Bill had been half an outlaw himself; as a wild young puncher he had repeatedly shot up the town of Tasco, formerly county seat of Valencia County, and had whipped the marshals the town of Tasco had brought in to curb the lawless cowboys. Then, inspired by a happy thought, the town of Tasco had made the puncher Bill Hartigan the marshal. Since that time, he had been known as Tasco Bill, fearless peace officer, tamer of outlaws and badmen.

Stockmen in Valencia County remembered gratefully the cattle thieves he had trailed down and brought in. The horse thieves Tasco Bill had sometimes brought in tied across a saddle, dead. "Which," Tasco Bill had said, "is the way a hoss thief, bein' so fond of hosses, ought t' ride."

But now they had told Tasco Bill that he was through, that the old days of trailing men on horseback were over—all because a bandit gang in an auto had carried out a series of successful raids on Plains City: robbing the bank twice, twice robbing stores, and once taking a mine payroll. They struck like a flash and escaped easily in the swift car they used. Tasco Bill had tracked them after each of their raids: one of the tires had a peculiar tread, leaving a plain mark in a dirt road. He had followed this telltale tire print over the plain, through Tasco Canyon and the deserted town of Tasco to the paved state highway ten miles beyond. On the paved road, all trace of the car had been lost.

Tasco Bill knew that the visit of the business men was more than a mere friendly call: it was an ultimatum to resign. If he did not, they would persuade the governor to throw Tasco Bill out of office in disgrace.

"Let 'em try to put me out," Tasco Bill grunted. "Let 'em try." His hands fell to his pair of guns. If he could only get at that crowd of auto bandits. He would fill them and that stink-buggy of theirs full of holes.

Filled with mingled anger and grief, Tasco Bill went to the stable back of the courthouse and saddled the old white cowhorse he had ridden for many years, named "Ghost." With his feet in the stirrups and the feel of the saddle under him, Tasco Bill felt better. He rode across the plain, riding along aimlessly, the bitterness in his heart mounting. He, Tasco Bill Hartigan, too old! Too old, hell's bells!

If he had been a drinking man he would have gotten drunk, but strangely enough, Tasco Bill was not a drinking man.

"I owe my success to not drinkin' liquor," Tasco Bill had declared many times in interviews given to newspaper men. "The rest of them old-timers ain't

lived as long as me account they drank whiskey. Me, I ain't had four drinks of whiskey in all my life. That's why I allus beat a outlaw to the draw and that's why I'm alive and kickin' to-day."

As a matter of fact, Tasco Bill had never been able to stand whiskey. A small drink of it made him extremely sick afterwards, and this unmanly weakness he had always covered up by pretending to hold temperance sentiments.

His "Ghost" horse, feeling a flash of old-time spirit, essayed two or three little sheep jumps.

"Stop it, Ghost; you're too old to be actin' thataway!" said Tasco Bill sternly. "You ought to be back on the ranch herdin' milk cows—just like they as good as told me I ought to."

Again he swore heatedly at the thought of being put out of the sheriff's office, dishonored. He, Tasco Bill, who had tamed Tasco, that wild old roaring cowtown, had made it eat out of his hand. He, who had killed five outlaws one single day in the streets of Tasco. He, who had chased numberless proud gunmen out of the place; had shot it out with badmen in a score of gun duels in its saloons.

He turned his horse toward the scene of those old battles, toward the town that had been Tasco, for Tasco was no more. The mines near there had failed, and Plains City had succeeded it as county seat, Plains City built up of brick, as contrasted to the homely adobe-walled buildings of old Tasco.

It was nearly evening when he came to the deserted town. The sun had already set for the bottom of the canyon, and the old town lay gloomy, forlorn looking, desolate. Many of its adobe walls had already crumbled and returned to the ground from which their bricks had been fashioned. Not a soul there any more, not even one of those prospectors who always cling to the abandoned camps. Not even a pack burro grazed in its grass-grown streets.

A few of Tasco's buildings still had all four walls and the roof left; some of these had been locked and their windows boarded up against marauders. The biggest of these was the store and warehouse building of the Tasco Trading Company. Big double doors opened on the street from the warehouse through which freight wagons had moved for unloading years before.

"I belong here, hoss," said Tasco Bill sadly as he looked at the ruin of the once roaring town. "I ought to be marshal of this place ag'in. That's a job I ain't too old to hold down."

He slipped off Ghost and walked along leading the old horse, stopping now and then to look at the buildings which brought back the most vivid memories. In this saloon building thirty-five years before, he had shot it out with Mex Joe and his gang. Three men had opened fire on him as he entered. Hit in the side, and in a leg, he had returned the fire, killing all three before he himself at last fell to the floor. Tasco Bill's big paws again fell to his guns at memory of that battle; his eyes flashed.

Each building held some memory for Tasco Bill. The girls in this place, an old dance hall, had all been young and pretty; and they had always been eager to smile and talk to him. But for that matter all the girls had smiled at him, for he had been the undisputed boss of Tasco.

In this building, the White Palace, had once danced a girl by the name of Jennie Dicks. He had had a fight over her in the days before he was marshal, when he was still a top-hand for the "Bar Slash L," owned by Jim Henaberry. Tasco Bill thought back with pride to the fact that he had been the wildest of the Bar Slash L's twenty-five wild young punchers.

More than once he had galloped his pony down this street at the head of the Bar Slash L riders, all of them shooting into the air, yelling like Indians. And many times he had ridden through the door of this building, then "Bull" Brady's saloon, never taking a drink, however, for his stomach somehow never could stand whiskey. In Bull Brady's saloon as a cowboy he had made a four-flushing marshal crawl on the floor, imitate the moo of a cow, the howl of a coyote.

And here was a gambling hall where as marshal, aided by a deputy sheriff, he had shot it out with the hell-raising trail crew of the "Big 6" Ranch. He had left six men lying in the street, and the rest of that tough outfit had galloped off in full flight from a town that had such a devil as Tasco Bill for a marshal.

He stopped before an old saloon that had long been locked. It had been called the "Little Angel," he remembered. He noticed the front wall had recently collapsed, revealing the sagging floor, with the bar and back bar, a roulette wheel and faro layout still standing in the place.

He grounded the reins of Ghost and left the horse, to step in over the rotted floor of the Little Angel Saloon, looking curiously about him. A section of the 'dobe chimney over the Mexican-style fireplace in one corner, he noticed had fallen.

Something gleamed dully in the dirt and he stooped to look at it. Then he reached down to pick it up; it was a quart bottle of whiskey, the label so discolored that he could not tell what brand it was. The saloonkeeper must have had a cache of some kind in the chimney, a secret place perhaps for a bottle or two of choice whiskey that he wanted to keep from his bartenders. Tasco Bill took out his big combination knife and used the corkscrew attachment to draw the cork. He smelled it. It was most certainly whiskey, and probably good whiskey, although Tasco Bill was no judge of hard liquor.

As he held the bottle of whiskey in his hand, Tasco Bill was reminded more sharply than ever of the old days of Tasco —when liquor had been the universal beverage. If he could only be a young puncher again, galloping down that street once more on a nippy winter evening, reins in his teeth, his guns roaring, people fleeing from his path while he shouted, "I'm a curly wolf and it's muh night to howl!" If only he were young once more —back in the days when Tasco was a roaring cowtown!

But about him was only silence, broken 'dobe walls, desolation, and he was an old man. Tasco Bill became so sad as he thought of all this that he ventured to take a sip or two from the quart of whiskey. The liquor had a pleasant warmth about it, it went down easily, seemed somehow to meet a need. Ignoring the fear of probable sickness to come, he swallowed a little more of it.

Dusk was coming, and still carrying the bottle, he got on his horse to ride up the street, past the old half-destroyed buildings that lined the street. At the head of the street he stopped and took a few more swallows from the bottle. This must be extraordinary whiskey, Tasco Bill was beginning to think. He already felt more cheerful. Whiskey had never before affected him this way; it had always made him instantly sick.

AS Sheriff Tasco Bill Hartigan rode out of town, one of the double doors of the big warehouse building of the old Tasco Trading Post opened, and a man stepped out. Five companions joined him and watched the rider vanish up the canyon.

The first man laughed.

"Why, that's the old cowtown, long-haired sheriff of this hick county," he said. "Tasco Bill Hartigan, they call him. I thought at first he'd smelled something and was spying around this town."

"No danger of that," said one of the other men. "We're too slick for that crowd of hicks. Gosh, and to think that fool sheriff was only ten feet away from the car with that tire that he always traces over to the highway." They all laughed again.

Tasco Bill had been close to a discovery. As he walked down the street of old Tasco, he had passed not ten feet from the auto bandit gang that had visited Plains City so often. That gang had a clever scheme. They and their car stayed in the deserted town of Tasco, in the Tasco Trading Post warehouse which had been locked up for years. On the night when they planned a raid, they drove out of Tasco ten miles east to the paved highway and back, leaving a plain double track on the dirt road. Then they drove in to

Plains City, did their job and raced back to Tasco, driving their car back into the warehouse and carefully sweeping away all trace of the car having turned off there. Meanwhile the road between Plains City and the highway showed a double track with their telltale tire.

Tasco Bill rode on up the trail, the same one the auto bandits used to go to and from Plains City. He had climbed halfway up out of the canyon when he decided to get off his horse. He did not feel just then like taking the lonely ride back to Plains City. As he dismounted, he wondered at the lightness and ease with which he did it; of late years his joints had seemed to creak when he climbed off a horse.

He sat down on a log and took a few more sips of whiskey. He seemed strangely exhilarated. His mind had never before seemed so active, so flooded with memories of things gone past. He continued to sit near the scene of his old triumphs in Tasco and went over a thousand incidents of the happy old days. As he did so, Tasco Bill now and then took another sip of the bottle. The longer he sat drinking the happier he got. Soon he began to sing—snatches of old songs sung in Tasco, some unprintable, others deeply sentimental—about homes and sisters and mothers there.

A coyote set out a long yapping howl from the opposite canyon rim and Tasco Bill jovially answered it. He felt suddenly so buoyant of body that even flying seemed no impossible feat. And his mind and the memories in it were as buoyant as his body. He had a few more swallows from the bottle.

Slowly the present faded and the past came back to him more and more vividly. And finally it came to Tasco Bill's mind that all of the recent unpleasant events of his failure as sheriff were only a bad dream. All a bad dream. He was a young puncher again—for did he not now feel exactly as he had felt in his younger days, carefree and with a tremendous feel of power in him?

He raised his voice in an exuberant yell: "Yipeeeee!"

The moon was rising red over the canyon wall. As it rose, it flooded the canyon bottom below him with light, shone on a window pane in the town far below, and reflected back from it with a red glow. Tasco Bill looked down on the town. The people had all gone to bed, he thought. Only one light was lit. He frowned. This would never do. What? Tasco already in bed; the town that was wide open day and night? This would never do.

The moon as it rose further touched lightly on the broken outlines of the crumbling walls of the old dwellings, built up the frameworks again into a seemingly compact town.

To Tasco Bill, pleasantly drunk for the first time in his life, the old town had come back to life—all the dreary years since he had left it had been erased from his memory. Why, he thought jubilantly, he had only been dreaming a bad dream that he had grown old. He felt younger, happier than he ever felt in his life. That curious feeling of buoyancy made him want to yell from sheer excess of good spirits, and he did so repeatedly.

"Hell, look at that town, already gone to sleep," he said to himself. "Gone t' bed, dang 'em. Well, it's up t' me t' wake 'em up. Yipeeeee!"

He sprang into the saddle without touching a foot to the stirrup. All the resistless power of youth surged through him. Tasco Bill was young again, the world was his to enjoy and before him lay the town of Tasco, wildest cowtown of them all.

"Yipeeeeee!" he yelled, and dug in his spurs. Ghost galloped away at a pace faster than he had got his legs to moving for long years. They made it to the bottom of the canyon, and to the head of the single long street that ran through Tasco. There Tasco Bill jerked back Ghost's bit sharply, making the horse rear high.

"Whoopeeeee! I'm just a black-maned, curly-haired wolf, and it's muh night to howl!" he shouted to the town of Tasco.

And then with the reins in his teeth, a gun in each hand, he raced down the street, screeching like a bobcat. As he

passed the first building, his guns began to roar, the shots sounding loudly in the canyon, their echoes crashing and rolling up the canyon slope toward the rimrocks.

"Outa muh way!" he bawled as he continued to fire. "Tasco Bill has come to town!

"I'm a hyderphobied, ring-tailed Giley monster!" he shouted to the empty adobe buildings as he dashed past. "Muh breath is plumb p'izen; muh slobber is plumb death. Whoopeeee! Hear me howl! Ride down any blankety-blank marshal!" Tasco Bill was now imagining that the punchers of the Slash Bar L were riding behind him as they had often galloped in the days when they had shot up the town of Tasco.

At the end of the street he stopped and poured out the empty shells on the ground and refilled the chambers. The powder smoke in the air was perfume to him. He sniffed it in delightedly.

"Come on, boys!" he shouted exuberantly to his imaginary companions. "Shoot out all the lights and run over anybody that gits in our road."

A thud of hoofs again as his old white horse pounded back up the street at a fast gallop.

"Wham! Wham!" again thundered the heavy guns as the lead peppered the walls of the buildings.

And then as Tasco Bill raced by the warehouse of the Tasco Trading Post, from one of the big double doors now partially opened, a shot and then another came, both in his direction. Hell's bells! Somebody was shooting at him! He could even hear excited talk from the direction of the big building.

"I'm stirrin' 'em up!" he said, and galloped on recklessly, still shooting. "Im a-wakin this town up all right." A bullet passed through his sombrero, making a big hole in it.

"Them damn fools is a-gettin' too close!" he bellowed in anger. "Yere I comes in peaceful-like to wake up this town a little and somebody makes a sieve of my hat. I'll wipe out this whole damn place for that."

He turned at the head of the street again and reloaded his guns.

"Come out of there, yuh skunks!" he bawled. "Come out in the open before I go in and drag yuh out by the neck."

And then he raced down the street again, only this time he concentrated his fire at the big warehouse building from which the shots had been fired at him. "Wham! Wham! Wham!" went Tasco's heavy belt-guns. Bullets whined by his head in return as he loped past. One cry came from the doorway—a hoarse cry of pain.

"Come on outa there, yuh skunks!" Tasco Bill yelled, and giving battle in earnest he flung himself lightly from his horse and ran to the cover of an adobe wall across the street from the warehouse.

From there, experiencing the keen joy of actual combat once more, he reloaded and shot, emptying his guns at the warehouse doors, whooping at each shot.

Lead sent in answer thudded against the adobe wall. Tasco Bill reloaded and literally sent in a hail of lead against the warehouse. In a minute his cartridge belts were nearly empty. Tasco Bill loaded his guns with the last of the cartridges and then suddenly coming out from behind the wall he charged the warehouse with the same reckless utter disregard for safety he had shown in his youth. As he ran he shot fast at shadows that scuttled here and there in the darkness, shooting with the accuracy of a frontier sheriff.

A gun flamed almost in his face, from a cornered bandit not four feet away; the bullet singed Tasco's whiskers. Tasco Bill cursed and fired, and the man fell in a crumpled heap.

"I'm a curly-haired wolf!" said Tasco Bill, looking for further opposition.

A big wagonlike object, its exact nature unguessed to Tasco Bill, in reality the bandit's auto, in it two men who hoped to flee to safety, backed toward him out of the warehouse doors. The two shot frantically at him as the car backed out, but Tasco Bill coolly emptied his guns of the last two cartridges. There was a crash of glass; the car backed driverless into a ditch and turned over on its side.

"Try to run that wagon over me, will yuh, damn yuh!" raged Tasco Bill. "C'mon out here and fight, if there's any more of yuh! I'm Tasco Bill, and it's muh night to howl!"

Silence save for a series of choking moans from a man in the big open doorway ahead. Then even that died away, Tasco's head cleared a little.

"Come on, you, and fight!" he repeated, but there was no one left to accept his challenge.

Along the road from down the canyon came the hum of a car. Its lights as the car started to speed through Tasco City brought into view the overturned bandit car with the two men in it, and the scattered bodies of other men lying in front of the warehouse. The car stopped. In it were five members of the delegation of business men that had called on Tasco Bill that day. They were returning from a call on the governor made to have Tasco Bill removed from office because of incompetency.

"What the hell has been going on here?" demanded the driver, Millard. "It sounded like a battle."

"Shore it was a battle!" said Tasco Bill thickly. "It was muh night to howl."

At first Millard and the rest thought Tasco Bill had gone mad and had run amuck, attacking some auto load of people. Then they looked at the car with the dead men in it, recognizing it as the elusive bandit auto. Then they looked over the camp which the gang had made in the old warehouse building.

"Six men! And Tasco Bill licked 'em single-handed!" they said wonderingly.

Tasco Bill had again climbed on his old horse, Ghost. He was singing:

Foot in the stirrup and hand on the horn,
Best damn cowboy ever was born.

"I showed that town!" he shouted triumphantly. "They ambushed me, damn 'em, just for wakin' 'em up, but I licked em! Yipeeeee!"

"I see it now," said Millard. "These bandits were holed up here: on the night of a raid they would drive down to the highway, turn around and come back to do their robbing. Then they'd hole up in this old shack again, leaving two pairs of tracks out to the highway. But Tasco Bill smelled 'em out and cleaned up on 'em. Boys, take off your hats to the greatest sheriff and gunman the West ever knew or ever will know."

Millard went over to pump Tasco's hand. "Forgive us, Bill," he said. "Forget what we said to-day. You game old cuss, didn't you get hurt a-tall? Tasco, there's going to be a holiday declared in your honor in Plains City. This puts all the rest of your feats in the shade—your wiping out six desperate bandits."

"Your name'll be in the headlines of every paper in the country, Bill," said another.

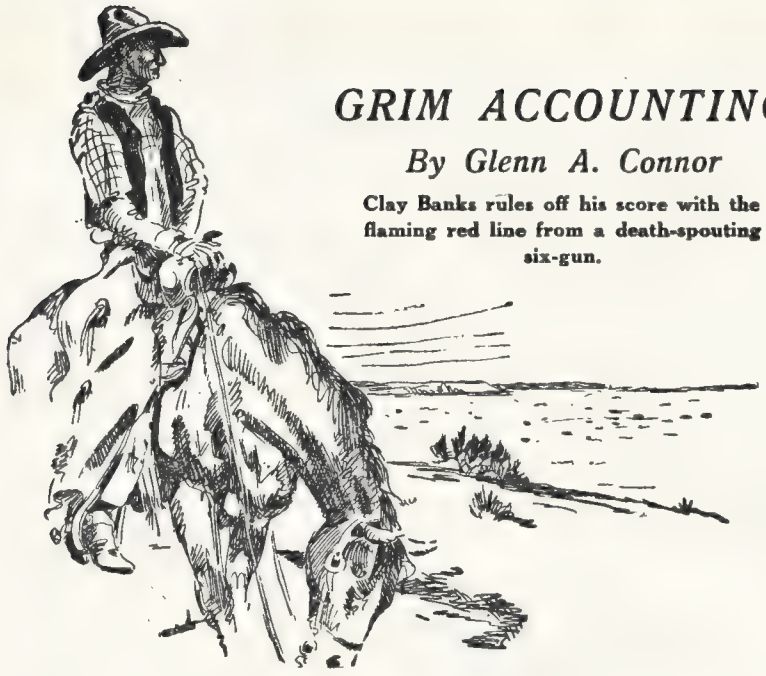
Tasco Bill mumbled perfunctory replies. He realized now what had happened. While drunk and dreaming a dream of his youth, of the glorious old days, he had wiped out not a bunch of old Tasco enemies as he had supposed, but that pesky gang of auto bandits. It had been only a dream—that feeling that he was young again, a dream brought on by the whiskey he had drunk. He was old, and the town of Tasco had been abandoned long years ago.

"What can we do for you, Bill?" said Millard. "Name it, and it's yours."

"Aw, go to hell!" said Tasco Bill irritably.

He had dreamed a dream of the old cowboy frontier days. But Tasco's walls were broken walls, its bars dust-covered from long disuse, the gay music of its dance halls had been silent for long years.

"Go to hell!" he repeated.



GRIM ACCOUNTING

By Glenn A. Connor

Clay Banks rules off his score with the flaming red line from a death-spouting six-gun.

CLAY BANKS rode along whistling a merry tune. He seemed not to have a care in the world. The big dun horse jogged along at an easy canter, ears perking forward alertly for no other reason than a curiosity at his new surroundings. After crossing many miles of barren, grassless country it was small wonder both took a new interest and appeared content.

The reason for that barren country they had just crossed was self-evident: The turf cut up by sharp hoofs, the cropped brush tops—a sheep country. The smell of sheep was even in the air. And Banks had the cowman's aversion for sheep. So did his horse. Both knew their criminal destruction of range.

So it was with relief and satisfaction they entered into the grass country, a wonderful sweep of rolling grassland, short, curly, hard grass that would put the proper meat on horses and cattle. They commenced to see cattle, mild-eyed Herefords that were too fat to show fear. The dun snorted with satisfaction. This was something he could understand and appreciate. Banks demonstrated his content by shriller whistling. The throaty song of the meadow lark arose about them, giving an even more peaceful aspect.

Banks squinted an eye at the lowering sun and then at the surrounding country. They had traveled the cattle range for several hours but there was still no sign of a ranch. Banks hit upon a reasonable conclusion—a broad range and a big spread in possession. He made note that most of the cattle bore the same brand, a fiddle-back. He remembered having heard of such an outfit, the Franey brothers', who counted their herds by the thousands. And their range wasn't overstocked. So he was entering upon it.

About sundown Banks struck a dim trail. It showed no signs of recent travel, or else recent rains had obliterated such signs. It was evident the trail was little used. But Banks followed it. It would lead him somewhere.

A little later he reined up with a quick catch of breath and stared hard. In the growing dusk it was difficult to distinguish, but at last he satisfied himself as to the identity of the white object. A sheep wagon! Sheep in a cow country!

Banks was incredulous, baffled. He hadn't seen any sheep signs for hours. Yet he couldn't be wrong. The tinkle of bells struck upon his ears, then a distant

blat. A film of dust arose back of the wagon. A sudden surge of resentment welled up within him.

But it all passed in a minute. Banks was practical minded. He had no interest in this range—yet. And night was coming on. Food was an important consideration—and a bed. Banks was traveling light. He trusted to luck and his course. He had eaten at sheep wagons before and was not averse to doing so again, particularly since no food had passed his lips since early that morning. He turned his mount's head in that direction. Whether he stayed all night or not depended upon the cleanliness and intelligence of the herder.

Banks found a man and boy in charge of the herd; he learned in the course of their conversation that they were father and son. They were both clean, and intelligent talkers. They owned the sheep themselves, a small band which they had bought up near the Montana line and were trailing to their ranch down on the Chugwater.

This explained many things to Banks: why the sheep were on forbidden range, and their owners' ignorance, ignorance born of inexperience. Impractical sheepmen, Banks surmised—homesteaders, newcomers who were ignorant of the contempt and virulence cowmen held for their profession.

Their invitation to stay the night was so warm that Banks was persuaded to warn them of their invasion. He slid his empty plate back with a satisfied sigh and eyed the older man contemplatively.

"Do you gents realize yuh've laid yuhrself liable tuh some trouble?"

"Hey?" Both men started and stared at him.

"If I'm right about whose range this is there's a deadline against sheep around it. What I savvy about th' Fiddle-back, they ain't got much respect for sheep an' less for sheepmen. They're liable tuh resent yuhr bein' in here if they catch yuh."

The older man spoke up hastily, explaining, "We're just trailin' through—they surely won't object to that. We didn't know we were trespassin'."

"I reckon that won't make a heap of difference if they see yuh. I've heard a lot about sheep an' cattle wars over in this section—there's still a heap of bitter feelin'. They're liable tuh shoot first an' ask questions afterwards. Take my tip an' start back trailin' in th' mornin'—go round an' avoid trouble."

"Ain't this government land?" The young man was inclined to be resentful. "Then I'd like tuh know why we ain't got as much right on it as they have!"

"Maybe yuh have, son. That ain't for me tuh say. But cowmen don't look at it in that light. They was here first. They run cows on it so long they feel they own it. Might makes right. That's th' way *they* look at it. They outnumber yuh twenty tuh one. Cowhands ain't got no judgment an' pull a wicked trigger. Better move."

The older man cut in swiftly: "We'll move. I've no wish to precipitate trouble. I can see the cattlemen's stand. I understand sheep are destructive to range—but this little bunch of ours—well—well, never mind, we'll move out in the mornin'."

Banks grinned ingeniously and thrust out an impulsive hand. "Shake. Yuh're white even if yuh are a sheepman."

The sheepman accepted the outthrust fist even while he exclaimed somewhat indignantly, "Is there any reason why a sheepman can't be as much a man as a cowman?"

"There ain't—but they ain't," answered Banks dryly. "If yuh live out in this country long enough yuh'll know what I mean. Cowmen gets along but sheepmen don't—not even among 'emselves."

A short time later they retired. Banks was invited to stay the night in the wagon, but he said if they would give him a couple of blankets he would bunk outside, explaining he was more accustomed to sleeping that way. His request was granted, and Banks spread his bed under the wagon. In a few minutes all were sound asleep, a gray blot back of the wagon marking the bedded sheep and the big shepherd in the wagon with his masters.

The moon arose full and cast a weird, ghastly light, a perfect setting for the tragedy about to take place. Shadowy forms appeared upon the opposite side of the draw south of the wagon, split, part of them disappearing into the draw, the other section dismounting and creeping stealthily upon the wagon. The gleam of moonlight upon rifle barrels gave the scene a chilling aspect—only there were none to view it. At the wagon three men slept, wholly unconscious of their approaching danger.

The first intimation that Banks had that something was wrong was the sudden leaping of the shepherd from the wagon with a deep-throated growl. The cowboy sat erect just as streaks of flame leaped toward the wagon. He heard the vicious spat of lead striking the canvas top, the whine of it off the wheels. For the moment he was too startled to comprehend. The threshing of a body overhead, then the dull thud as it struck the floor awakened him to partial reality. He was reaching for his own gun when a ball struck his left arm and sent him crashing and writhing back upon his blankets.

Banks lay there for several minutes, dizzy and faint, holding to consciousness by sheer force of will. All sounds within the wagon had grown still. He was hardly conscious of the new sounds arising at the back: the renewed popping of guns and frightened blatting of sheep. The firing where it had started had ceased. Banks was struggling for clear thought when his eyes were drawn to his right hand by the sensation of a steady dripping. He jerked his hand toward his eyes and stared. Blood! He jerked his eyes overhead. A steady drip, drip struck the canvas covering of his bed, dropping from the floor of the wagon.

It all came to him with a shock—his new-made acquaintances, his warning. Black rage seized hold of him, an indignation seething and consuming. He again started groping for his gun when the sound of voices halted him. He lay still, scarcely breathing.

"They're done—fire th' wagon!"

Banks rolled over cautiously that he might get a better look at the speaker. But the man stood in the shadow. All Banks could distinguish was his unusual size. Footsteps approached from the rear, passed him so close he could have reached out and touched them. He heard the banging of a tin can and the slosh of some liquid. A moment later the smell of coal oil penetrated his nostrils. Banks caught the flash of a struck match. A little later the forms started to retreat.

Again the man that gave the order to fire the wagon spoke. "We'll split an' ride back tuh th' range single an' in doubles. An' you yaps want tuh keep yuhr mouths shut. Rafe might not approve of this but it's th' only way."

The tone was hard, coarse, unfeeling, with a certain peculiar quality that struck oddly upon Banks ears. "All right, big boy," he muttered thickly, "I'll recognize *you* if I ever run across yuh again!"

He watched dim forms mounting, then listened to the pound of hoofs as they rode swiftly away. All grew silent except a crackling of fire. The smoke rolled under the wagon in a sudden suffocating puff and Banks knew it was time to move. As he lurched to his feet, the top caught in a sudden burst of flame, lighting the tragic scene to his staring eyes. He stumbled over a stiffening form and stared down at the faithful shepherd. All about him were dead forms, the gray bodies of sheep. Much as he disliked sheep his heart turned sick within him at such a merciless slaughter. Then his eyes turned back to the blazing wagon.

His former emotions were as nothing compared to those he experienced now. Distinct in his memory were the likable qualities of the two, the older a man of principle and honor that had unconsciously won his guest's respect. Cut short in their walk without a chance for their life, without warning. That wasn't the way cowmen fought! Banks clenched his fists and raised them high with a choking oath. He was helpless to do more. It was impossible to rescue the bodies from that raging inferno.

"You was white, mister, an' I never

broke bread yet with such a man without I didn't feel some way indebted. An' that kid—just facin' his future—it's a damn, burnin' shame. Maybe this ain't my mixin'—but knowin' what I do—I reckon I'll call for justice!"

Banks turned away, unable to stand the sight longer. A whistle brought the big dun. His trappings were lying some distance from the wagon, leaning against a big sagebrush. Not until he started to lift the heavy stock saddle to his horse's back was he reminded of his own wound. He flinched with the effort and looked down in surprise at the blood-soaked sleeve of his shirt. Blood coursed down it and dripped off the ends of his fingers.

He ripped off a part of the sleeve and examined the wound as best he could in the moonlight. So far as he could distinguish, it was a flesh wound, made ragged by a ricocheting bullet, more painful than dangerous. He tore the remainder of his sleeve off and bandaged the wound as best he could. The feat caused him some agony, that he only set his teeth against, as he set out in the direction taken by the raiders, instead of heeding the warning of the throbbing pain. His plans were not entirely definite. He meant first to identify the raiders, or as many as he could. Then maybe he would report to the sheriff. Or he might force the issue himself. Banks was sufficiently stirred up over the thing to take almost any measures.

BUT man proposes and fate disposes. Whatever Banks' plans might have been, they were not to materialize. A dun horse appeared in Basin the next night, his saddle stained with blood but minus a rider. Rafe Franey was last to join the excited group that surrounded the horse and the first to propose action.

"Back trail 'im—something serious has happened tuh his rider!"

He led the bunch that set out to hunt and was the first to come upon the body stretched out upon the trail a dozen miles west of Basin. It was his resource that sustained the little spark of life that remained in the poison-bloated, inert body; and it was he who saw that it was carted as humanely as possible back to the Basin hospital.

Clay Banks, the light-hearted cowboy of good impulses, ceased to be when he returned to consciousness. The doctor, a hearty, fat little man, choked on the warm greeting that sprang to his lips as he entered the room of the patient he had held small hopes of saving. The white face, hard glaring eyes, and bitter compressed lips caused him to shrink back against the door with something like terror. The doctor was accustomed to reactions of his patients, but nothing to compare with this. Murder was in the heart of Clay Banks, in the glaring eyes.

"Why did you do this?"

The doctor quickly overcame his paralysis and stepped forward with a hasty explanation, laying a soothing hand on the good shoulder of his patient. The hand was swept roughly aside. Banks listened with cold regard.

It had been absolutely necessary to amputate his arm to save his life. Blood poison, then gangrene had set in—

Banks cut him short with a bitter, "Better tuh let me die—than tuh go through life like this!"

The doctor talked to him long and encouragingly, trying to ease the bitterness in his heart. But he might as well have kept silent for all the impression his words made on his patient. Banks' was a deep seated rage, a horror that would never be entirely obliterated.

Six weeks later he was discharged from the hospital. Neither the doctor nor the sheriff had been able to wring from his lips how he had received his wound. Banks kept his lips tight closed, sinisterly so. His hard attitude boded ill for somebody. Sheriff Wright thought it wise to detain him for a time longer, but he could find no legitimate excuse for doing so.

The doctor accompanied Banks to the outer door of the hospital, worked up as he had never been before. Nothing had ever been said about a charge, but Banks himself broached the subject now.

"My only connections with the hospital are my patients here, so I have nothing to

do with their charges. But I know their rate. Eight weeks is four hundred dollars. My bill is—nothing."

"I haven't th' money now but I'll pay—pay yuh all," answered Banks. "Write Atwater at Mesa if yuh want references."

"I am satisfied," gently assured the doctor. "As for the bill here—I'll stand good for it until such time as you can pay." He thrust his hand out hesitantly, doubtful of its acceptance.

But to his relief and joy Banks grasped it and wrung it hard. Banks found it in his heart to forgive him, realizing after analyzing the whole thing over and over that any physician would have done the same thing. But he did not forgive the ones responsible, who had made the amputation necessary. The desire for vengeance burned in his heart until it tortured him.

The doctor's relief was profound but his joy was short lived after he inquired Banks' destination: "Where are you going now?"

"To hell!"

The little medico recoiled before the hate and venom in his hoarse reply. Banks turned and left immediately, swinging down the street in long strides. The doctor stared after him with hypnotized eyes, a distinct picture forming in his mind that he was later to recall: the somber face and catlike tread and the big forty-five slung low at his right hip!

Two days later the doctor received a parcel through the mail. He broke it open and brought to light a sheaf of bills —eight hundred dollars! To the top was pinned a note: "Clay Banks pays his debts."

He was puzzled as to where Banks could have so soon raised such an amount—but not for long. It was Sheriff Wright who dropped into his office later in the day and spilled some news. The sheriff showed evidence of a recent hard ride.

"Rafe Franey was held up last evening on his way to th' ranch with th' payroll. An' there's sure something puzzlin' about it. He had something over two thousand dollars. This mornin' he found all but eight hundred dollars layin' on his desk."

The doctor opened his lips to speak and closed them as quickly—closed them hard. The sheriff continued, "I been lookin' high and low but can't even get a clue. I first off thought of that one-winged gent yuh just turned loose, but I just can't picture him in that rôle."

The little doctor couldn't either, in spite of the certain evidence that Banks did hold Franey up which he had in his possession. There was some explanation, some reason. That was the reason he kept silent.

The sheriff was regarding him intently, but the little doctor's face was expressionless. He was a man accustomed to controlling his emotions, hiding his inward feelings. If Wright expected to read anything from his manner he was sorely disappointed.

"I think you are right, Sheriff. Clay Banks never struck me as a thief," replied the doctor slowly, calmly, with assurance.

Sheriff Wright was convinced. "I knew it!" he ejaculated, crashing a fist down on the doctor's desk. "You been around him —you know how tuh read character. That's all I wanted, yuhr word. I'm lookin' elsewhere."

If the doctor had any qualm of conscience he stifled it. Wright whirled to go without any effort on the doctor's part to stop him. But as soon as he had disappeared out of the door the doctor made a vehement gesture.

"A little more of this and my word won't be worth a damn! But I couldn't help it. Somehow I've got faith—he'll explain!"

A week rolled by. And then one afternoon several of the Fiddle-back riders rode into town. The doctor gave their arrival but passing notice, little dreaming the stage was being set for a tragedy. And Sheriff Wright never had an inkling of what was to occur. However, he knew the Fiddle-back riders, knew them for good waddies but a hard, reckless bunch. The Franey brothers had grown a habit of hiring that type during their trouble with the sheepmen. Maybe they kept that type now to discourage the sheepmen

from attempting any further invasions. The punchers were a hard riding, hard drinking lot, and when they started drinking trouble generally followed.

So Sheriff Wright was keeping an alert eye upon them. Their first destination was the Howling Wolf Bar, a saloon of the lowest type, a hell hole. It was the sheriff's one Nemesis, the particular one of several such establishments which galled him. In view of what he foresaw, he stepped into the Howling Wolf and warned the patrons who had just arrived.

"Better put a check valve on yuhr thirst, boys. I'll stand for no foolishness this trip."

They promised him with solemn faces and reassuring waves of hands that they meant no devilment this time, and Wright retired in no way convinced. He took his stand across the street where the fat little doctor had his office, seating himself before the window where he could look out.

"Trouble's brewin'," he informed the doctor as the latter jerked his head erect with a look of mild curiosity. He had been glancing through some medical papers. "There always is when th' Fiddle-back's in town."

The doctor nodded absently, then exclaimed unexpectedly, "Get any trace of the fellow held Rafe Franey up yet?"

"Not a hint! That deal sure has me stumped—"

"Clay Banks—you haven't seen him?"

"That one-winged gent? Nary hide nor—" Wright broke off abruptly as he glanced out the window. Sudden shrill yells from across the street had drawn his attention. But that wasn't what jerked the startled ejaculation from his lips.

"By Gawd, Doc, here he comes now!"

The little doctor joined him at the window with a strange cry. Together they stared out the window at the figure riding slowly up the street, his eyes strangely centered upon the Howling Wolf, the empty left sleeve of his leather jacket flopping grotesquely. Something like a disappointed exclamation dropped from the doctor's lips as he saw the new arrival rein up before the Howling Wolf and stare at the mounts tied before it. Exclamation of a different nature dropped from the sheriff's lips as he noted this regard. Something in its cadence drew the doctor's attention toward him, startled.

"What's he up to?" The words burst from Wright's lips, puzzled, concerned. Banks had slipped from the saddle and was striding toward the saloon. They saw him pause for a moment between the swinging doors he held apart with his body. Then he disappeared inside.

"What's he up to?" repeated the doctor, staring anxiously at the face of the sheriff.

"Damned if I know—but I aim tuh find out!"

Wright whirled and dashed out the door. The doctor watched him cross the street and pause just outside the swinging doors. Loud voices sounded from within but what they were saying came to the doctor's ears in a bedlam of senseless chatter and drunken laughter. . . .

FOR a week Banks had haunted the vicinity of the Fiddle-back, had witnessed the arrival and departure of many riders, riders of all types; slim, brown-faced, gay, laughing types and the gun-toting, hard-featured type that seldom laughed. He couldn't believe them all concerned and he couldn't eliminate.

He watched the wagons stocked, watched them pull out for the round-up . . . and he followed. When they were well away from the ranch several riders separated from the main group and headed toward town. Banks took a short cut back of an intervening ridge and concealed himself in a heavy growth of greasewood close to the trail. He did not debate long with himself after a view of their faces. It was a group of those hard-featured riders his mind had settled upon before. He knew the habits and the weaknesses of the type he sought. After they had passed he, too, turned his horse's head toward town, riding leisurely.

That was why he did not arrive until some time later. That was the reason the Fiddle-back riders were already under the influence of liquor when he arrived. That is just what he had planned, what he desired. A man in his cups is liable to

talk if properly encouraged. Banks wanted to be sure. . . .

His eyes gleamed satisfaction, sinisterly, as he paused for a second between the swinging doors and took in the scene within. Boisterous laughter and boastful talk—it promised well. He loosened the black-butted gun in its holster and sauntered inside.

Eyes swung his way, eyes that were hard and glittering and seeking an outlet for the devilment that was pent up behind them. One made a vicious remark about one-winged gents, and the others gaffawed at his sally. Another ordered Banks to the bar to drink with them, and when he kept on toward a table against the opposite wall without deigning them even a glance, this last speaker stepped toward him with an insulting oath.

"You low-down snake—too good tuh drink with us, hey? Come back here!"

Banks whirled about, the thumb of his right hand hooked in the waistband of his jeans under his jacket, a good foot away from his gun. He controlled his voice with difficulty but answered calmly enough:

"Thanks. I don't drink!"

"Oh, yuh don't? One of these skim-milk drinkers, hey?" The tone was offensive in the extreme. "By Gawd, yuh'll drink with us! We're from th' Fiddle-back—an' us Fiddle-backers is *bad!*"

All this Sheriff Wright witnessed from behind the swinging doors. He saw the rider lurch forward, hand on his gun, when a gruff voice from the bar halted him.

"Aw, let 'im go, Chick, he's nothin' but a damn sheepherder!"

The man called Chick stopped dead in his tracks, his body swaying precariously forward, his gaze intense. If the other man had expected to avert trouble he had taken a miserable course.

"Sa-ay, you a sheepherder?"

" 'Course he is," sang out the same voice. "What else these one-winged birds good for?"

Banks' pulse leaped. It seemed the opportunity he looked for had arrived. He stood as he had stood before, his slim body crouched just the least bit, his thumb hooked loosely in the waistband of his overalls. His eyes bored like gimlets as he softly drawled:

"What if I am?"

"What if yuh are?" howled Chick. "Why us Fiddle-backers is sure death on such skunks! We sure are!" The ugly features were thrust toward Banks. "Hell, we just busted loose on one of yuhr kind not long since—sent him tuh hell a-scootin'. Me, I set fire tuh th' wagon that burned th' evidence!"

On the other side of the doors Sheriff Wright gave a violent start. He had heard of the slaughter of sheep and the burning of a sheep wagon on the outer edge of the Fiddle-back range. But no evidence had been found that the herder had been killed. He understood now—the body had been hidden—or cremated on the spot!

He had questioned Rafe about it, but Rafe disclaimed any knowledge. Knowing the big cowman as he did, Wright had dropped the case for the time—and for several reasons. The first was that the younger Franey's word was as good as gold. If Rafe said he didn't have anything to do with it he didn't. Neither was it his method of fighting. Wright hadn't been on the ground himself, but he had been given a very accurate description. Rafe would not needlessly butcher stock. And it was a strong supposition that whatever had taken place had taken place without warning. Neither was that Rafe's way.

On the other hand the sheep had no business in there. Wright's sympathy was emphatically with the cowmen. The country wherein he represented the law was a cow country. But a few miles distant from where the tragedy had taken place the PK range commenced. The PK men were little less severe on sheepmen than those of the Fiddle-back: it might have been them who were to blame.

And that was out of Wright's jurisdiction. The PK was in another county. Let the sheriff there handle the case until he himself ran down the party who had held up Rafe Franey, was Wright's decision.

But there was one of the Fiddle-back

riders admitting his connection. Wright listened, shocked and dazed. A medley of protesting voices tried to silence Chick but he was too far under the influence of the fiery liquid to heed. He continued recklessly:

"Yes, sir, it was me, Chick Winters, fired th' wagon. I took a look in as th' blaze flashed up an' saw two bodies—one layin' on th' floor, th' other hangin' over th' bed. We'd sure done 'em brown!"

"You murderin' whelp—go for yuhr gun!"

That hissed challenge startled the cowboy to soberness. His hand leaped to his gun instinctively, a scarce two inches to travel, even while his mind struggled to comprehend. But he was never to know. Words ripped from Banks' lips as his right flashed downward and up.

"For th' old man an' th' boy—*take that!*"

Winters took it—square between the eyes, as his own lead kicked up splinters at the feet of his challenger. He crashed backwards upon the floor and lay inert. For a second a silence so tense followed a dropping pin could have been heard distinctly. Then Banks spoke, coldly, eyes blazing upon the assemblage:

"You murderin' whelps didn't know there was a third party there that night—under the wagon. I *ain't* a sheepherder—but I never broke bread with a honest man yet—sheepman or cowman—that I wouldn't square an account for. They was innocent of any intentional wrong—plumb ignorant of what they had done till I told 'em. They aimed tuh pull out first thing next mornin', anxious tuh recognize th' rights of a cowman."

Banks paused to let this soak in. That his words had effect was displayed upon the faces suddenly grown sober. Some of the figures squirmed and grew pale. Others met Banks' cold regard doggedly. There could be no doubting their guilt.

Bangs continued in the same cold, emotionless tones, "But yuh gave 'em no chance, no warnin'—*murdered* 'em in cold blood! Some of yuhr lead found me. Before I rode away I promised 'em I'd see justice done." Banks pointed his gun at the figure on the floor. "He's paid!"

"But this—" he wriggled the empty left sleeve of his jacket, "made it a personal affair! I'd like tuh know th' man that done it—*I'd kill him by inches!* I'd let him know th' horror of bein' a cripple—*a part of a man! Tell me who done it and I'll spare the rest of yuhr lives!*"

Men stared back at him white lipped, wishing they could speak. Banks himself knew there could be no answer to the agonized cry from his lips. On the other side of the doors Sheriff Wright listened, too stunned to interpose.

Suddenly the sheriff was brushed aside as a huge figure charged into the saloon. He caught but a fleeting glimpse as the man plunged between the swinging doors which immediately closed behind his back. But he recognized the Fiddle-back range boss, "Heavy" Lewis.

Lewis paused just inside the doors and glared at the figures lining the bar. His emotion was too great to notice their trancelike attitude. "You damn fools!" he bellowed, his ungovernable rage on the ascendency. "Can't a man trust you out of his sight? I sent yuh out with th' wagons—not tuh town for a tear!"

An ejaculation back of him caused him to whirl about. Banks was staring at him with livid eyes. "That voice—"

Blue eyes and gray clashed and held. What the blue eyes saw in the gray ones caused him to shiver involuntarily and his hand to flash to his gun. But he didn't draw. His eyes became drawn by something yielding his foot struck.

"Chick! What th' hell—*I heard shots!*" He glared at the foremost figure for explanation.

He blurted: "That feller done it!" A shaking finger pointed at Banks. "He was there, Heavy, at camp that night!"

Lewis whirled around with an oath. "You—what d'yuh want?" he snarled.

"Revenge!" roared Banks. *"You* led 'em—I recognize yuhr voice. *Draw!"*

Lewis' gun was already out. He started fanning the hammer with the palm of his left hand. But the slim form of the one-armed rider leaped aside, doubled up like a jackknife. His gun roared once.

The big foreman stiffened, lurched, but kept fanning his hammer. The lead whined and crashed into the opposite wall four feet out of line with Banks. As the hammer fell upon an empty shell Lewis wavered, swayed, and crashed to the floor.

Other guns commenced to roar. Banks felt the wind of one pass his cheek. Another tugged viciously at the empty sleeve of his jacket. He did another dazzling shifting of position and started shooting. The four remaining bullets brought down as many standing figures, groveling on the floor. His foot struck the fallen gun of his first victim and he snatched it up. A bullet struck his hip and whirled him half about. Another clipped his ear as he was straightening up. Once, twice, thrice his fresh weapon spoke. Then Banks sank to the floor with a low moan.

When his eyes fluttered open he saw a fat little doctor bending over him, beaming with satisfaction. "They can't seem to kill you, can they, Clay? And now they won't ever have a chance!"

Banks jerked erect and stared about at an awful scene of carnage. Figures lay sprawled all about the floor, lying in pools of blood, silent, inert. In a corner Sheriff Wright had dragged and was guarding the few remaining living. Banks' eyes returned to the little doctor aghast.

The little doctor nodded. "You done the most. The sheriff and I took a hand at the last. He knows the whole thing now—overheard their talk and yours—but he was too stunned and amazed to take a hand until he saw you fall. And now here you are ready for the hospital again."

Banks must have decided the same thing, for consciousness instantly deserted him. When he again came to, all of an hour later, it was to find himself on a little white bed in a white room. Then he heard footsteps and voices out in the hall.

Banks looked up as the door opened. He started as he saw the pale face and blazing eyes of Rafe Franey.

To Banks' amazement the cattle king came forward, and grasped his hand.

"Boy," Franey exclaimed, his voice choking with emotion, "if I could give yuh back yuhr arm—if I could give back that old man an' his boy their lives—I'd give my own tuh do it—"

"Hush," gently interposed the doctor, who had followed him in, laying a hand on his shoulder. "It wasn't your fault—"

"It *was* my fault—they was ridin' for me!" exclaimed Franey bitterly.

"But you didn't know—"

"No, I didn't. You believe that, Banks? You don't think they done it on my orders?"

Banks had only to look into the man's eyes to know. He had the further evidence of his own ears to vouch for Franey. "Rafe might not approve—" How distinctly he recalled the words!

The hard look had gone out of Banks' eyes, the bitter lines away from his lips. He answered softly, "No, Franey, I reckon yuh're innocent. You don't strike me as that kind of man. Th' others has paid. Let's forget."

Franey sprang to his feet and faced about. "Hear, Doc? He says it's all right. He's white—generous minded. Now will yuh let me square up with him by doin' what I asked to?"

The little doctor turned and addressed Banks: "He wants to pay your doctor bill —and the other one. What shall I say?"

Banks' hesitation was but momentary. A twinkle lighted his eyes. "Tell him it's been paid—that he's paid th' first bill."

"I paid it—" Franey stared blankly.

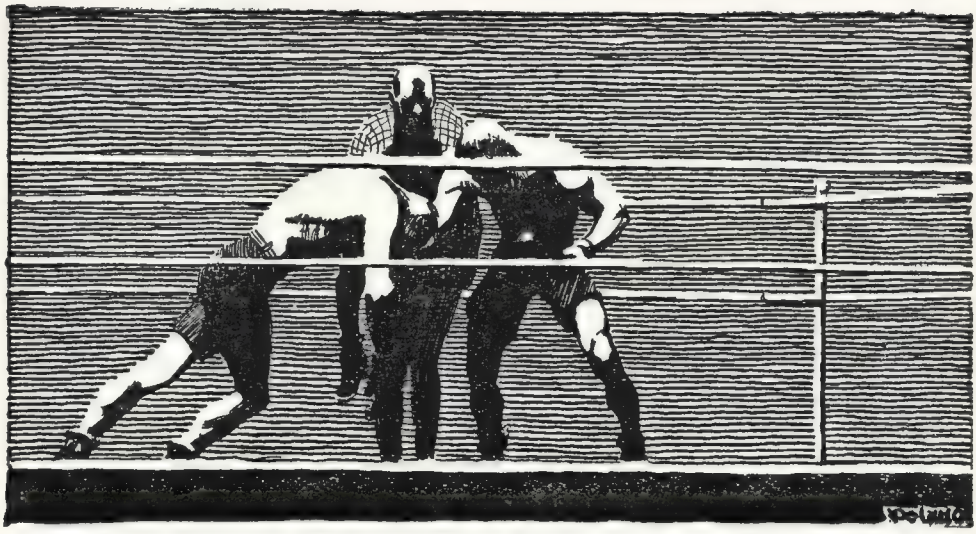
"Forgot bein' held up?" drawled Banks. Comprehension slowly swept Franey's face. "I figgered yuh owed me—"

Franey was again at the bedside, clamping a hand over the confessor's lips. "Shut up—not another word. Doc, don't you cheep about this to th' sheriff—let 'im go on guessin'. Banks, yuh're too damn good a man tuh be idle. I've got a foreman's berth vacant—what say?"

"An' me with one arm?"

"One arm, hell! Any man c'n throw lead fast an' fatal as you done must have a dozen. But you won't need only one tuh wrangle th' riders I hire from now on."

"Yuh're on!" said Banks, and there was a world of relief and gratitude in his ready acceptance.



THE LUCKY SEVENTH

By Joseph B. Fox

There's no punch, packed in gloves, that can knock out the Kid's faith in his favorite number.

"I'M tellin' you," said Stub Ross, as he applied a little collodion to the small cut under Kid Burdett's left eye, "some day you'll fool around with one of these birds just one round too long. You could 'a' put him away," nodding toward the Kid's opponent in the opposite corner, "last canto as easy as rockin' a baby to sleep."

"Listen," retorted the Kid, "you manage the money, and match-making, and I'll do the fighting. I've always knocked 'em kicking in the seventh, haven't I?"

"Oh, all right, have it your way." And Stub Ross, manager of one of the best welterweights in the country, subsided.

True enough, Stub reflected, the Kid in his last fifteen fights had always managed to kayo his opponent in the seventh round. But Stub was old in the game, and he didn't believe in this new fangled idea of history repeating itself. Now that he had so carefully nursed the promising youngster along the hard road toward pugilistic prominence, and gotten him within hitting distance of the welterweight crown, Stub was afraid that the Kid's foolish lucky seventh complex would prevent him from realizing his one ambition—to manage a world's champion.

"All right, Kid," said Stub, as the bell rang. "This is the seventh, do your stuff."

"Watch me," smiled Kid Burdett confidently, out of the side of his mouth, as he slid from his corner.

It was the same old story. "The Packinghouse Terror," unmercifully beaten in the previous six rounds by the Kid's terrible right, lasted just two minutes before he nose-dived out of further danger.

"What's the matter with the lucky seventh now?" grinned the Kid, as Stub worked over him in the dressing room.

"You win," acknowledged his manager, with a shrug. "Only," he added, "I sure hate to see you get the idea that there is such a thing as a lucky round in any fight. The only lucky time is when you get a chance to stretch 'em. If that chance comes in the first minute, that's your lucky round, get me?"

"Too bad we can't agree on that, Stub, old-timer," argued the Kid. "Seven is my lucky number any way you like to take it. Seven letters in William, my first name, and seven more in Burdett. I was born on the seventh day of July, the seventh month, seven years after my parents were married. Try and beat that combination," he finished triumphantly.

"Oh, I know," and Stub sighed wearily. They had gone over all this so many times now, and always with the same result. The Kid's belief in the lucky seventh was becoming more fixed with each succeeding bout.

"I've got enough confidence to keep any of these guys from handing me a pastin', haven't I?" countered the kid.

"That's not the point," persisted his manager. "You earned your chance with Young Skelly, the champion, to-night. Boy, he's some class, what I mean, and if you let any chance slip to smack that lad down, just because it doesn't happen to be the seventh round, your folks sure enough raised one foolish child."

"Aw, hell, Stub, you don't get my idea at all. I'm not goin' to pass up any chances to kayo the champ. Think I'm crazy? You don't understand. My chances all come in the seventh, that's all. If I got a real chance to put Skelly away in the first canto, I'd do it, and don't let anyone tell you different."

Even this didn't convince Stub. He had noted too carefully, for his own peace of mind, how the Kid often deliberately nursed his opponent along, so that he could pander to his hunch concerning his lucky round.

The sports writers called Burdett "The Kid with the seven complex," and more than one astute scribe predicted disaster, should Kid Burdett persist in these same tactics.

However, no one denied the fact that the runner up for the title was a real battler. Moreover, the Kid was a general favorite with the fight fans, for he was always ready to mix it from gong to gong. The rougher the going, the better he liked it. And so far, he had none of the disfigurements that come to those who follow this game. His flashing brown eyes looked out from a strong face that was unmarred by twisted nose or cauliflower ears.

Although the sporting sections of the papers began the usual ballyhoo to bring Young Skelly, the champion, and Kid Burdett together, McKettrick, the champion's manager, seemed disposed to delay the meeting for the time being. Movie and vaudeville contracts, all plenty fat, were his for the picking now, and McKettrick, having watched with knowing eyes Kid Burdett's phenomenal rise, was gathering shekels while the gathering was good. One could never tell in this game. Skelly was getting on in years, and while he was by no means an old man, still . . . Burdett was young, clever, and a terrific puncher. Anything might happen . . . any time!

But McKettrick was not one to let the grass grow in his ears while he slept. His keen brain was busy at least eighteen hours out of each twenty-four. That was how he had brought Skelly to the front. And with the material he had in the beginning, this was some feat in itself, for the champion was certainly not the brainiest of fighters. He was willing, and he had a real fighting heart, but he needed McKettrick's sound advice. This was the combination that McKettrick had welded into the fighting machine that stood on the welterweight pedestal. Skelly had tottered on his throne several times lately, but always, with McKettrick's aid, had managed to retain his balance, both on the throne and in his bank book.

PROBABLY the dance, given to commemorate the opening of the New Arena, had considerable to do toward hastening the signing of fight articles between Young Skelly and Kid Burdett.

Dressed as the "Queen of Sport," Madge Kennedy looked ravishing. Skelly and Burdett, as the two brightest pugilistic lights in the crowd, were introduced to the queen together.

Instantaneous dislike for each other took possession of the two men, and when Madge granted the Kid a place on her dance program, before Skelly could edge in a bid, the champion suddenly discovered that he would take great pleasure in meeting this debonair youngster in the ring, any old time.

"The old lucky seventh is still working for me," laughed Burdett, as he gracefully piloted the slim form of Madge through the maze of dancers. "This is my seventh dance to-night, and I meet you!"

"I've heard a lot about you and the number seven, she smiled, "but I'm not superstitious myself."

"Neither am I, except that number," he laughed; and they talked of omens, signs, and superstitions until all too soon he realized the music had stopped.

Skelly came to claim the next dance, and the two fighters glared at each other for the fraction of a second, until Madge, with an airy "See you later, Mr. Burdett," allowed Skelly to lead her away.

"Boy, oh, boy!" exploded the Kid to Stub, as the latter spoke to him, "did you get an eyeful of that wonderful girl?"

"I s'pose she's the seventh girl you've been waiting to meet," jibed Stub.

"No, but I met her for the seventh dance," laughed the Kid.

"Oh, good Lord!" Stub groaned, raising his hands in disgust.

The tenth number was a tag dance, and when Kid Burdett firmly tapped Skelly on the shoulder, as the champion danced with Madge, Skelly's resentment flared.

"Aw, go take a walk," he snapped, trying to lead his partner away.

"I'm not in the habit of taking walk-out powders, myself," sneered Burdett.

"Is that meant for me?" inquired the champion, stopping dead, and unclasping Madge.

"Take it if you like the taste of it," the Kid invited.

The immediate crowd, sensing that something exciting was imminent, began to mill around the three principals. Only the hasty interference of the fighters' managers prevented the unusual spectacle of the world's two best welterweight pugilists engaging in battle, without the formality of signing articles and donning gloves.

"Maybe I can coax you into a ring now," jeered Kid Burdett, as Stub and McKettrick led their respective charges away.

"You don't have to coax, bozo," called Skelly, over his shoulder, "I'll sign with you right now."

"Mr. McKettrick and I'll attend to that to-morrow," cut in Stub on the instant. At last he had the champion and his manager in a position from which there could be no more evading.

Seeking to find Madge, to offer his apology, and, if possible, make an appointment for a future time, Kid Burdett reached the door just in time to see Madge drive off in a car. But his heart was singing, for he had performed the well known classic of falling heels over head in love at first sight.

The next day the sports writers had a delightful surprise to spring on the followers of the leather-pushing game. Fight articles had been signed for a title bout between Young Skelly and Kid Burdett!

Both fighters immediately went into training, although the Kid did not throw himself into the task with his old time energy. To Stub's way of thinking, Madge Kennedy was taking up entirely too much of the Kid's time. But the big ballyhoo went merrily on.

"Grudge fight," was the term used by the boys who hand out the news dope, and some girl was mentioned as the cause. One Sunday edition came out with pictures of the two fighters as the base of a triangle, while a girl formed the apex. In large captions the writer of the article asked, "WHO IS THE GIRL?" And the alert news hounds soon found out, and gave the fighters lots of space. Each day the aces, in ever increasing numbers, crowded into both camps to satisfy their curiosity concerning the merits of the battlers.

A few days before the fight, as he was doing his daily road work, the Kid stepped to one side to allow a roadster right of way.

Through the cloud of dust he recognized Madge, and—Skelly! Fierce animosity brought his jaws together with a snap, and that evening he was more forceful than diplomatic, in demanding an explanation from her.

"Surely I have a right to go out with whom I please, haven't I, Mr. Burdett?" she countered, when he asked her bluntly why she had taken the ride.

"Sure," the Kid stammered, at a complete loss to match her coolness. "But—

well, you see, I—I don't like you running around with Skelly. There has been enough stuff in the papers already, and well. . . ."

"I'm sure I can't very well prevent the papers from printing what they may think is news, can I?" she questioned.

"No . . . that is . . . well, yes, you can," he said quite heatedly. "Don't go out with Skelly."

"I shall go with whom I please, and when I please," she rejoined, also with heat, and Burdett left in a fine unreasonable rage.

Stub happened to choose this night, above all others, to give his protégé a little advice.

"Now, for *once* Kid," he began, "forget that seventh complex. Get in there and fight, never mind about rounds."

"Go to hell," snapped the Kid. "I'm going to fight my own way, and I'm going to win, too, you can bank on that."

"Why all the steam?" demanded Stub. "Had a tiff with that girl you are so crazy over?"

"That's my business," answered the Kid. And Stub, wise in his generation, shrugged his shoulders, and with a lifting of eyebrows, allowed the matter to rest.

The Kid's letter to Madge, which he wrote on the following day, brought no answer, and he flung himself into his work.

The day of the fight arrived. The publicity men had put over a fine job, and the New Arena was packed to the rafters.

The preliminaries were short, but full of action, leaving the fans in just the proper frame of mind to appreciate the main event. The champion, ignoring precedent, was already in his corner when Kid Burdett, with his retinue, entered the ring amid cheers and the stamping of many feet.

Skelly was leaning over the side of the ropes, talking to someone, and when the Kid saw that the person engaging the champion's attention was Madge Kennedy, a fierce resentment flared in his heart. So, evidently Skelly was the reason Madge had failed to answer his letter, eh? Well, after to-night a lot of things would be settled.

Skelly came over to his challenger's corner, with a hard little smile on his thin lips.

"Well, Kid, hope you're feeling fit, and may the best man win."

"Don't worry, I will," answered the Kid abruptly.

Skelly took this with a slow, exasperating smile that prodded the challenger like a goad.

"Keep your goat in it's pen, Kid," advised Stub quietly. "He's doing his best to get you all riled up. That's only one of his many tricks. He's got a bagful."

"Don't forget the lucky seventh!" called Skelly over his shoulder, as he walked to his own corner.

"Aw, go to—" the Kid started to retort hotly, but Stub smothered the rest of the sentence with his hand.

"Don't be a sap," he hissed. "Save it, and tell him with gloves. He'll understand better."

While they were fitting his gloves on, Burdett looked over toward Madge, and was rewarded by a sweet little smile that set his heart to racing madly.

"Get your mind on the fight," warned Stub, who had noticed the by-play.

The referee's call to the center of the ring for instructions prevented a caustic answer from the Kid, but Stub saw plainly that his charge was in a highly excited frame of mind.

As the two fighters stood in the center of the ring, under the banked arcs, they presented a sharp contrast. Skelly, with a grin that belied the hard glint of his cold, blue eyes, took no notice whatsoever of the referee's talk. It was old stuff to him. His cauliflower left ear and somewhat battered nose were accented more sharply, as one took in the clean-cut features of his challenger.

The Kid, brown eyes flashing with battle light, seemed like a hound on the leash, his restless, shuffling feet betraying his eagerness.

Back to their corners . . . house lights out . . . an expectant hush, as the fighters pulled on tautened ropes and scuffed rosined shoes on the canvas . . . then the gong! A nervous giggle from

some overwrought woman at her first fight . . . a touching of gloves as they met; then two darting straight lefts from the Kid—light ones, but they found their mark—and instantly the place was a bedlam. A general exchange followed, and the fighters settled down to business.

The first natural nervousness over, it is no soothing job, this meeting a champion for the first time. The Kid thrust all thoughts from his mind, except those pertaining to the fight. There was no time to worry over Madge now.

For the first time in his fighting career, the Kid found himself against a man who could not be roughed at will. It was not for nothing that Skelly had earned the name of being a rough and ready mixer; and the challenger, after two or three rough clinches in which he by no means came out best, decided that he was in for a long, hard fought battle. But the confidence of youth surged through his responsive torso, and he was not afraid of the outcome.

Then in a clinch Skelly sneered:

"Well, I sure made a bum outa you. Thought you could beat my time with Madge Kennedy, didn't you? Too bad. You're too damn slow to catch a racing tortoise. I *married* the little lady *this* afternoon!"

For an instant the Kid was stunned more effectively than if he had taken one on the button. Then with a superhuman heave of his splendid muscles, he was free, and tore into the champion as though possessed. The gong found him smothering the title holder with a veritable rain of gloves.

"Listen," cautioned Stub, as he deftly wiped the Kid's face, "don't be in such an all fired hurry. This scrap is for fifteen rounds, understand? What did Skelly say to you to make you fly off the handle like that?"

"Plenty," snapped the fighter. "He said he married Madge this afternoon."

"Well, what of it?" questioned Stub. "If he did, that's all over, and the only thing left for you, is to *go get that title.* You can do it. I guess that ought to be a good way to get even—eh?"

The bell called the battlers to action again before the Kid could frame a suitable answer, and Stub was worried.

"At least the Kid's got something to think about besides the lucky seventh," said Stub to himself, as he swung the stool back and climbed out of the ring.

The second and third rounds were clearly the Kid's, but Stub's brows were furrowed with lines of worry, for he saw plainly that the champion was allowing his opponent opportunity to tire himself.

"Take your time—take your time, Kid," soothed the wise Stub, between the third and fourth sessions. "You're playing right into Skelly's hands. McKettrick and the champ have you all doped out, and they are playing you for a sucker. You're swinging like a gate in the wind."

"I'll get him. I'll get him," gritted the Kid, as he noticed Skelly lean over the side of the ring and say something to Madge. But in his anger he failed to see the look of scorn the champ received.

As the bell clanged for the fourth, Kid Burdett raced across the ring and was on top of the champion before he could get well out of his corner. But Skelly wasn't to be caught napping. A short feint with his left that puzzled the Kid, and the next instant, his mighty right caught his adversary flush on the chin.

For one heart-stopping second, the Kid wavered on his feet unsteadily. Like a flash, Skelly stepped back to put over another in the same place, but before he could set himself, the Kid had clinched, shaking his head in an effort to clear the cobwebs.

For the remainder of the round, the Kid was forced to play a defensive game, and the worried Stub heaved a sigh of relief when the bell called the minute interval.

"Now you play a wise game, see," he advised the Kid. "Tighten up your defense, and let Skelly work on you for a round or so. He's not in the best of shape. I notice he seems to tire easy. Use your noodle, and don't let him hang on in the clinches. Make him work. Play for his wind. Don't listen to anything he may say to you. McKettrick tells him all

those wise cracks, between rounds, and that stuff is just plain, goat-getting hooey. That's the way they win their fights. Not with Skelly's hands alone, but with Mac's brains."

During the next three minutes the Kid followed Stub's suggestions so closely that Skelly decided to change his tactics—and in the sixth, the spectators came to their feet as one person. The champion had come to life. With a cyclonic rush, he was out of his corner before the clang of the bell had died, and the Kid learned some of the inside tricks of dirty fighting. The heel of Skelly's glove caught him flush on the chin, jarring him to his very toes. This was followed by a slashing, short arm jolt that left lace marks across Burdett's cheek, and before the Kid could counter, Skelly had his arms pinioned, while he growled tauntingly in his ear:

"Here's where your light goes out Kid. I've got the girl all tied up, and now I'm going to show her what a monkey you are!"

In a blind rage the Kid surged free, and tore into the grinning Skelly. But his judgment was warped by the killing anger that filled his heart, and his blows were short and easily blocked by the crafty champion.

A powerful right uppercut to the wind, a little low, bent the challenger over, and Skelly's left hand flashed in a vicious arc to meet the Kid's unprotected jaw.

He was down on one knee, while the mists of a pain-deadened brain dimmed the shouts of the fans. And Stub's shouted directions to stay down and take a count came to the Kid as though from behind closed doors.

Blindly the Kid staggered to his feet, only to be met by the rushing Skelly, who leaped from a neutral corner, tensed for the kill. A battering right smash caught the Kid on the button again, and he felt that he was slipping . . . slipping . . . down. He felt as though nothing mattered now. He wanted rest—that was it—just a few moments of rest, and everything would be all right again; and his muscles relaxed, as he sank to his knees.

In a muddled way he thought that if the waves that were breaking on a rocky shore somewhere would only stop for a moment, he could hear the numbers that the referee was counting out so faintly. But it didn't matter so much, anyhow. . . . Madge was married . . . what difference about this fight . . . but, damn it all, it did matter! . . . Then, piercing through the veil of semi-consciousness, came a sharp command—a woman's voice:

"Kid, get up and get him!"

In a split second the Kid's brain cleared. That was Madge Kennedy's voice; he would recognize it even though he were dying. A shake of his tousled head, a supreme effort to coordinate his lagging limbs to the will of his determination, and he came slowly to his feet, amid the deafening howls of the fight-fanatic fans.

Instinct rather than skill kept the Kid on his feet for the remainder of the round; but Skelly, though bringing every trick of his trade into play, could not connect solidly again.

Stub stepped inside the ring to meet the weary Kid as the bell rang, and began to work on him before the other handlers could spring to action.

"How do you feel?" inquired McKettrick in the other corner, of the champion.

"Just about all in, Mac," panted Skelly. "He's one tough youngster. I gave him the book that time . . . guess I haven't got enough, any more."

"Aw, bunk!" returned McKettrick. "You've got plenty left. We've got the big shot left yet. Don't forget that. We almost got him on the girl racket, and we *will* get him on the next gag sure. Remember this is the seventh coming up, only three more minutes to go. Shoot the piece this time, and we've still got the old money-getting title safe."

"Now, you listen to me," Stub was saying, and his tone plainly indicated that he meant every word. "You get out there this next round, and stall him off. Don't try swapping punches. Do your damnedest to git him at long range. I know that he just about shot his wad in that last one. So, don't take chances. There's a long way to go yet, and you ought to stand the gaff better than he." Then as the bell

rang, he muttered to himself: "Thank the Lord he won't try for a knockout this time, even if it is the seventh. He's got that foolishness pounded out of him, I hope."

Glancing at the card raised aloft, on which appeared the number of the coming round, Stub blinked unbelievingly. The card read: *Round* 8.

"Hey, what th' hell!" he exclaimed, and started for the youth who held the printed lie.

Out of the corner of his eye the Kid noted the sign at the same time, and bewilderment dazed him. Why, that couldn't be right. This should be the seventh—his lucky seventh. But his head wasn't quite clear yet . . . maybe it was the eighth round . . . maybe he had fought through the seventh with his brain so foggy that it hadn't registered properly. Anyhow, there was the sign, and it read *Round* 8. His lucky chance had passed . . . he wondered why Stub hadn't said something.

All this came in a flash. He hadn't time for further speculation. Skelly was giving him all he had, intent upon getting in the punch that would seat his crown firmly again.

But the Kid noted that the champion didn't use his right hand now. True, he made many feints with it, but the threatened punch never came through. He was slowing up, too, and his straight left jabs didn't have much steam behind them.

"Come on, Kid, step on it," from Stub, brought the Kid back to earth again. This was no time to figure out the many puzzling things that beset his brain. There would be time enough for that afterwards.

The Kid came to life with a suddenness that again brought the huge crowd to its feet in clamoring excitement.

The champion was either shamming, or he was slipping fast! Which? That was the question.

"Unhook that right!" bellowed a fan vociferously. "Hey! come to life, Champ!" came from another customer.

But Skelly was near the end of his string. His sleep-producing right was causing him untold agony. Three broken knuckles are not of much avail against a young, tough, clever fighter.

McKettrick, in the champion's corner, knew that the end was near. At last his fertile brain had been outmatched by youth, skill, and fair play!

As the champion clinched desperately, McKettrick picked up the sponge, and waved it with a lift of eyebrows toward Skelly.

But the champion's smile was still in evidence as he vigorously shook his head. No! He'd go down fighting with everything he had. They'd never be able to say he didn't go out like a real champion. He'd take the count on the canvas . . . taking just the same dose that he had given others!

The Kid was clear-headed again now, and as he rushed Skelly into a corner, Stub shouted:

"This is the seventh, Kid. Get him! They tried to run a sandy on us."

Thrilled to the core, the Kid heard and understood. They had tried to fool him. Before him the champion was making his last desperate stand. The roar of the crowd sounded like the yowling of ten thousand furies:

"Kill him!" "Knock him cold!" "Smash him, Kid!" came hurtling through the air from all sides.

Skelly smiled grimly through his agony. His memory flashed back to that night five years before, when many of this same mob had stood up on their seats and begged him—then the challenger—to do the very things to the champion that they were now beseeching the Kid to do to him. Well, they wouldn't have long to wait. About one more rally, and he was through. Both eyes were rapidly closing, and his right hand was already swollen to twice its normal size.

Still he managed to stall the Kid off. Duck and clinch, sidestep; not by any means sure-footed, but foxy enough to make the other miss—slipping this right hook, and taking that left jab as he was going away—but this couldn't go on forever. Why didn't the bell ring? . . . Or had the round just started? . . . Brain must be getting hazy. Wow! That one

had plenty of stuff in it . . . strange it didn't hurt, though . . . must be past that stage. . . . But, God! that right mitt hurt. The old psychological gag didn't work so good this time . . . the Kid wasn't fooled so easy. . . . Wow! that was a sweet one. . . . If that right hand were good, he could win this fight yet—maybe. . . .

His timing now perfect, the Kid was making every punch count. The knowledge that Madge had called to him, when it seemed inevitable that he was losing, caused hope to flame again. Maybe Skelly had lied about marrying her. . . .

Now, here was his chance to put the finisher over: The old one-two punch. One in the belly—one on the chin. Then as the champion, with that silly look, bent forward grotesquely, the Kid's murderous right, traveling not more than six inches, but packed with T.N.T., stretched Skelly on the blood-stained canvas. The champion made one futile effort to rise, then slumped inertly over on his back, arms outflung!

Ten seconds! The title had changed hands!

"Good luck, Kid. You ought to go far," murmured Skelly, when the newly crowned champion was able to make his way to his late adversary's corner.

"No, take this one," he grinned, holding out his left hand to the Kid; "the right went back on me in the sixth."

"You're as game as they come," declared the new champion, earnestly, "even if you did fool me about the seventh. And I wish Madge and you all the luck in the world."

"That was another good one, gone wrong," admitted Skelly, with a brave attempt at a smile. "Go ask her about it yourself. I think she wants to speak to you."

The Kid turned toward Madge, who was standing close to the ringside, to meet adoring, deep violet eyes, looking full at him from a face suffused with rose-tinted blushes.

She held out her right hand to him, smilingly.

"Let me see the other one," demanded the conqueror.

Demurely she obeyed.

"Where's your wedding ring?" he asked sharply.

"I haven't any right to wear one—as *yet*," she answered, dropping her eyes before his intent scrutiny.

With a bound the Kid took the top rope, and stood beside her in the milling, excited crowd.

"Madge!"

"My full name is Marjory Kennedy," she said, with a twinkle in her eyes. "There are two *more* sevens to add to your collection."

"Damn me, if you're not right!" declared the new champion inelegantly. "*Now* I'm *sure* that seven is my lucky number."

"Oh-h-h," groaned Stub. "I s'pose this means a wedding on the seventh of July?"

"Stub, for once you're right!" agreed the happy Kid.

HUGE MOUNTAIN TUMBLING INTO LAKE

SLOWLY crumpling and losing its bulk in tremendous rock slides, a large mountain has stirred tourists with its phenomenal movements.

Millions of tons of earth and boulders have tumbled into a canyon below the rocky giant. Nearby, Fremont Lake, with huge deposits of rock in its bed from the slides, has overflowed and another lake is being formed. The main slide was reported a half mile wide.

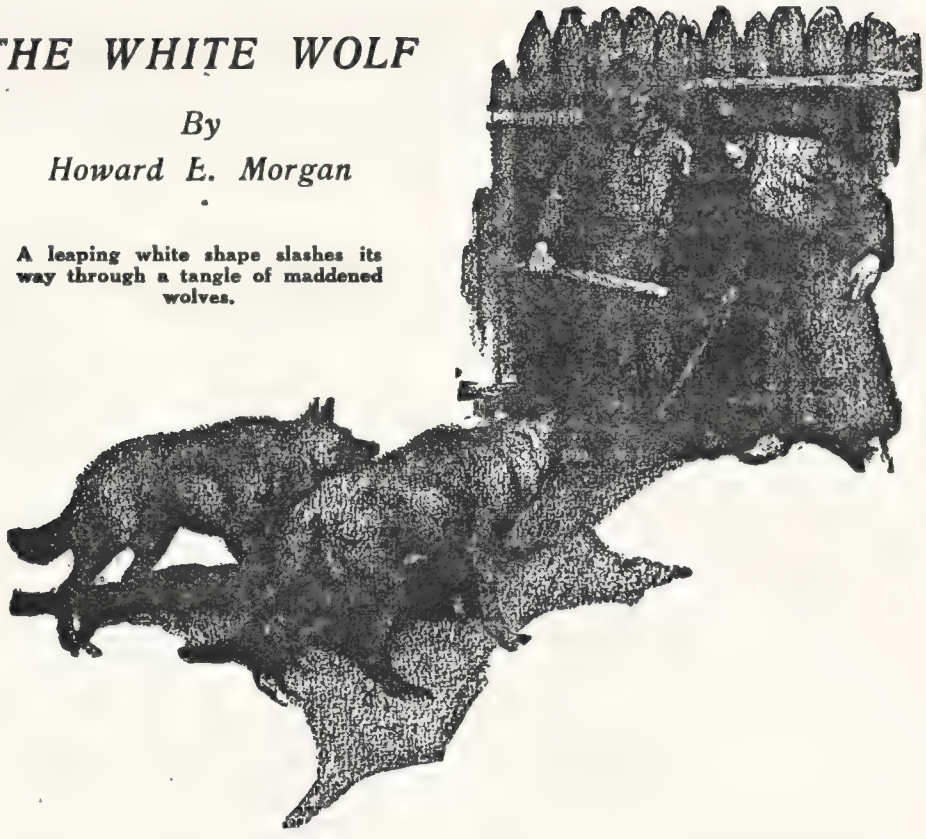
George Reddick, Omaha capitalist, owner of a summer home near Fremont Lake, said he observed twelve distinct movements in a day. The noise of the rock tumbling 1,000 *feet down the mountainside was distinctly audible to L. W. Sargent at Daniel, Wyoming, fourteen miles away.*

The mountain is approximately 10,000 *feet above sea level.*

THE WHITE WOLF

By

Howard E. Morgan



A leaping white shape slashes its way through a tangle of maddened wolves.

HIS big body pleasantly attuned to the zestful sparkle of the crisp winter morning, Jean LaFarr, the Grizzly of the Karoketts, swung swiftly on through the white thicket, his objective the collection of log shacks half a mile away, the little settlement of Moose River. As he went, the big trapper hummed a gay French tune and jingled the half dozen gold coins —lonesome remnants of his worldly wealth —in a mackinaw pocket.

For the past several months, misfortune and Jean LaFarr had been uncongenial but consistent companions. Long since, he should have started his trap-line in the Karokett Hills. But there had been no money with which to purchase the necessary supplies, a crooked fur buyer having cheated the trustful Jean out of much money. Now, with something less than a hundred dollars, borrowed from a friend, he was on his way to Moose River to purchase such supplies and equipment as this slender wealth would permit.

He pushed through a clump of thick growing firs and the village, set in a half circle about a sharp bend in the stream, appeared abruptly before him. The day was young and a whispering stillness hung over the little settlement.

This stillness was suddenly broken by a bedlam of yelps and snarls, interspersed with a man's hoarse voice raised high in bitter curses.

The song died on Jean LaFarr's lips. His step slowed. His quick eyes failed to locate immediately the source of the disturbance, which disturbance was evidently caused by a man and a dog. Without doubt the dog was a very bad dog, the big trapper told himself. Hence, the man was beating that dog. All of which was the man's business and none of Jean LaFarr's. Still Jean LaFarr knew dogs and loved them; there was no need for any man to beat any dog. Of this, Jean LaFarr, from his own experience, was convinced. Still, other men thought differently on the matter.

With a shrug, Jean LaFarr continued on his way. But his step still was slow, and when the sound of blows accompanied by a man's gusty grunting and a dog's moan of pain again sounded, nearer at hand this time, Jean LaFarr swore softly and turned from the trail toward the spot from which the sounds emanated.

He came upon the scene abruptly; and, as that unpleasant picture came clear, his big body tensed with a mighty rage. Before a little log lean-to, recently built, a thick-shouldered, hairy man stood over a dog, a sturdy club upraised in his right hand. The dog, tied by a chain to a sapling, had wound that chain around and around the sapling until now its shaggy head was held close against the tree. In this position the animal was at the man's mercy.

The man's black-whiskered face was convulsed with rage. Evidently here was no ordinary argument between a bad dog and its master. This man would *kill* his dog. The will to murder was written in that ugly face. Certainly no dog could be so bad as to deserve such an ignominious death.

Jean LaFarr strode forward swiftly. He caught the man's upraised hand which held the club. His strong fingers closed with bone-crushing force about that thick wrist. With very little apparent effort he brought that arm down, down, until the black-whiskered man was on his knees in the snow. The club slipped from the dog beater's numb fingers.

Jean LaFarr relinquished his grip. He stooped and quickly retrieved the club. Quick as his motions were, the black-whiskered man's movements were as quick. With a muttered oath he scrambled to his feet, drawing a short-bladed knife from his belt, even as he came erect.

Jean LaFarr's dark eyes gleamed; his full lips parted in a half smile. "So, dees rat he would fight, eh?" he murmured. Black Whiskers' left arm flashed above his head. The knife flew from his fingers straight at Jean LaFarr's heart.

But the Grizzly of the Karoketts, huge bodied and strong as he undoubtedly was, was also swift as the grizzly in his movements. With an almost imperceptible shrugging motion he turned aside; the gleaming knife brushed against a button on his mackinaw with metallic clatter and sped harmlessly away. Within the next instant the knife thrower found himself seized by the loose collar of his coat; Jean LaFarr's strong fingers tightened there, until the black-whiskered man could scarcely breathe.

Many men, some of them half dressed, attracted by the commotion, came running. Jean LaFarr glimpsed many friendly faces among these.

"Witness, my frien's, dees rat, dees peeg, who would kill hees dog wit' a club. I do not know dees creature. Maybe, he ees one of high estate. Eef so, dees fac' weel avail heem not'ing. For he possesses de soul of a rat, an' he shall be beaten wit' dees club, even as he did beat hees dog."

Anticipatory smiles appeared on the dark faces of many of the onlookers. Several voiced their encouragement. Jean LaFarr did not need this encouragement to urge him to the task which he had already decided to perform. With a wrenching downward motion he dragged the dog beater to a reluctant kneeling position in the snow. Then he applied the club, indiscriminately, upon the man's broad back and shoulders.

With each blow the beaten one howled for mercy, which was a very poor way indeed to beseech clemency from these strong men who looked upon mere physical discomfort as a thing of little moment. But Black Matt O'Rivney was a chechahco, a tenderfoot. He did not know these men. Anyhow, he was at heart a coward.

So it was, after observing that his howls—from which a casual observer might have judged that he was being beaten to within an inch of his life—availed him nothing, he assumed an attitude of complete exhaustion, lying flat on his face in the snow and moaning weakly. Jean LaFarr was surprised at these actions. He was deceived, too, as Black Matt O'Rivney had intended he should be.

With an exclamation of disgust, the big Frenchman finally thrust the cowering dog beater away and turned his attention to the dog, which still lay flat on its belly in the snow, close against the chain wound sapling. With fearless fingers, Jean LaFarr sought and found the clasp upon the dog's collar. Muttering friendly words he undid that clasp. Then, kneeling in the snow, he swiftly and skillfully inspected the big dog's shaggy body, for evidence of the hurts which that murderous club must have caused.

The dog's ribs and back were literally covered with purple welts; but Jean LaFarr could find no evidence of broken bones. Only its wonderfully muscled body had saved the dog from serious injury. When the animal finally struggled to its feet under the big Frenchman's friendly urging, LaFarr, for the first time, fully appreciated what a splendid creature his efforts had saved from a miserable death.

Jean LaFarr had owned many dogs. He had seen many others—champion sled dogs, terrible fighters, wolf dogs, huskies, malemutes, beautiful mongrels—but never in his life had he seen a dog like this one. This beauty was snow white in color from the tip of its pink nose to the end of its bushy tail. Two almond shaped spots of gray, just above either eye, alone broke this harmony of color.

In stature and other breed points the white dog was a beautiful image of those long-limbed gray wolves of the Yukon, with which latter Jean LaFarr was all too familiar. Only one feature did this splendid white beauty possess, which spoke eloquently of the strain of dog in him: this feature was his eyes. Instead of the motionless, greenish colored eyes of the wolf, this big fellow's eyes were brown and soft—the eyes of that most loyal, that most unselfish friend of man, the dog.

Lost in admiration, Jean LaFarr knelt there in the snow. His own eyes stared into the white dog's eyes. The dog's brown eyes, liquid with intelligence, stirred Jean LaFarr strangely. The man reached forward impulsively and pressed his whiskered cheek against the white dog's pink muzzle. A fearsome sound rumbled up out of the big dog's throat. The men called out in warning, but Jean LaFarr laughed. He knew dogs. In that throaty growl he had detected only love sounds. As he pulled away, a long red tongue reached for his face. "By damn, dat dog she ees mine, my frien's. What say you, —Rat? You sell dat dog to Jean LaFarr, eh?"

Black Matt O'Rivney still cowered in the snow. He moistened his dry lips nervously and his little green eyes flitted craftily here and there. "Sure I'll sell," he quavered; "but he's an awful good dog, Loup is. He's worth a hundred . . . a hundred dollars . . . easy."

A storm of protest came from the spectators, most of whom were Jean LaFarr's friends. "He lies, Jean, dat dog ees no good. He ees not broke to de sled—"

"He ees a wolf—"

"Loup ees hees name, Jean. An' a wolf he ees, indeed. The black devil gets him for not'ing from Indian Joe."

"Dat ees right, Jean; dees Black Whisker pays maybe a pint of whiskey for dat Loup—"

"A ver' bad dog, Jean; not broken to sled—"

To all of which information, friendly as it was intended to be, Jean LaFarr answered with an expressive shrug.

"A wolf, eh? Bah! What I care? Already he ees my frien'. I have no need for a sled dog. But, eet ees not good dat a man should live alone in de wilderness, an' so, I take dees Loup, dees wolf, wit' me. One hunder' dollars for him say you, Rat—"

And then for the first time, Jean LaFarr, he who always had money in his pockets, realized that during the past eight months he had become Jean, the Unlucky, and that now the total of his wordly wealth was less than one hundred dollars. He jingled the small handful of coins in his pocket, suggestively. Finally, he counted out fifty dollars in gold.

"I gif you dees money, feefty dollar, for your dog, Rat. I t'ink maybe you say yes, eh?"

Black Matt O'Rivney did say "yes." He would have gladly sold the dog for a pint of whiskey, exactly what he had paid for him. He had learned, much to his sorrow, that a full grown dog not broken to harness is a thing of little value in the Northland, where all living things, particularly men and dogs, must work to live.

Jean LaFarr tossed the coins into the snow at Black Matt's feet and turned away.

Always one to act first and consider consequences later, Jean LaFarr did not fully appreciate what a foolish thing his acquirement of Loup, the white wolf dog, was, until later in the day. In the first place, his payment of fifty dollars for the dog had been very, very foolish. He could without doubt have secured the animal for much less than this. He had need of every dollar of that money for most necessary supplies and equipment, things which would serve to keep life in his body during the long winter months to come.

The dog was not broken to sled, hence would be of no use to him. He could not possibly take along sufficient food for the dog. Even his supply of ammunition for his rifle would necessarily be low. All in all, he could figure out no way of taking the dog with him to his trap-line a hundred miles distant on the opposite side of Karokett Mountain.

Reluctantly, therefore, he beseeched his good friend André Chautard to keep the dog until spring. The sturdy André, ready and willing to lay down his life for Jean LaFarr if the exigency demanded, readily agreed, although none knew better than Jean the unpleasant difficulties that such a task might well impose upon himself.

However, unpleasant situations have a way of smoothing themselves out, regardless of the contrary efforts of mere man. So it was that even as Jean LaFarr tramped on into the snow-clad hills next morning, bound for his distant trap-line, fate was taking a hand in his affairs. Several times during the day the big trapper experienced a queer, shuddering sensation, as though unseen eyes were watching him from the depths of the black thickets bordering the wooded trail.

At dusk when he made temporary camp on a wooded ridgetop nearly twenty miles from Moose River, a shadowy shape drifted out of the shadows and joined him beside the little fire. The visitor was the white wolf dog, Loup. The short length of babiche, neatly severed by the animal's sharp teeth, still trailed from the dog's collar. Jean LaFarr was glad.

"An' so, we try dees business togedder, you an' me, eh Loup? Eet ees well. André, he would have bad time wit' you, for sure. You an' me we be great frien's. We eat somehow, eh Loup?"

The big dog, undemonstrative as a wilderness sphinx, made no sign, but its big brown eyes were eloquent with understanding.

In the days that followed, the friendship between Jean LaFarr, that carefree young giant, and Loup, the stolid, picturesque son of the wolf, grew to a point where its tenderness might well have shamed that ofttimes incomplete friendship of man and man.

LaFarr's chief worry, food, was automatically solved in so far as the dog was concerned, at least. For Loup was a great hunter. The dog never refused tidbits offered by the master. Neither, however, did he beg for food. Always he seemed well fed and happy. Jean LaFarr knew that the dog made his own kills. Many times was that white coat smeared with the blood of a caribou, with which the hills were at this time of the year abundant.

But it soon became evident to the superstitious Frenchman that his spell of hard luck was not yet broken. The big snows came earlier than usual this year. Periods of terrible cold, following closely one upon another, sealed the mountains in snow and ice. Due to the frequent storms and the terrible cold, countless hundreds of the wilderness dwellers perished miserably. Fur-bearing animals were in consequence scarce. Jean LaFarr's trap-line was time after time buried beneath icy drifts. When finally uncovered, the traps were all too frequently empty. With the coming of the first big storm the caribou had vanished magically.

Even the moose, those hardy monarchs

of the wild, left Mount Karokett's snow-hidden foothills for the less frigid swamplands in the lower valleys. Food was scarce for man and beast. The meat-eating wilderness denizens, half starved, desperate, fought among themselves. Even in the daytime the gray wolves howled on the ridge tops. There were several packs of them. Jean LaFarr had never seen so many, nor had he ever seen them so fearless. Oftentimes they circled closely about the cabin. In the gray nights he could see their almond shaped eyes, reflected in the light from the cabin's single window.

Of course, there was logical reason for their boldness this year. Always before he had shot at them. This year he did not do so. Ammunition was scarce, and therefore precious. Many times the trapper was almost persuaded to wage relentless warfare on the wolves. There was no meat to be had within a radius of ten miles about the cabin. The wolves were responsible for this. Well Jean LaFarr knew that the gaunt beasts had no designs upon him, starved though they might be; but so long as there was meat in the cabin they would remain near. But he always decided against open warfare. His scant store of ammunition might one day stand between him and starvation.

By Christmas the usually optimistic trapper had become almost convinced that his efforts this year were due to end in failure. The terrible cold continued. Prime pelts became scarcer and scarcer. The meat secured by his rifle, which alone stood between him and starvation, became harder and harder to secure. In addition to this an attack of scurvy, resulting from the lack of vegetables, added to his troubles. Even this scurvy took a more arbitrary turn than it had ever taken before. Starting with a painful stiffening of his ankles, it soon reached his knees. Strong man that he was and courageous of heart, he found it increasingly difficult to make the rounds of his ever shortening trap-line.

And then, shortly after the first of the year, came the crowning misfortune. Loup, whose companionship had alone rendered the dismal, gray nights liveable to the man, went away. Jean LaFarr was heart-broken. Curiously childlike in his sentimentality, the simple-hearted Frenchman for the first time lost courage, as might another strong man of deeper mentality upon being deserted by the woman he loved.

"By damn, Jean, you are no good for sure," he told himself. "Eet ees no luck. You are jus' no good. Oui, dat ees eet. Wan a man's dog weel have no more of heem, he ees—what eet ees de Yankee say —de cheese. Oui, de one beeg cheese."

But it was not this shallow pessimism alone that finally persuaded Jean LaFarr to start for Moose River. His ammunition was low, very, very low. There were few more than a dozen shells left for his rifle. The scurvy was becoming daily worse. Game was getting scarcer.

So it was that, two weeks after his canine friend had left him, Jean La Sarr, carrying a very light pack, containing in the way of food only a small piece of jerked beef, hobbled away upon the hundred-mile return trip to Moose River.

From his two hundred and thirty pound bulk of red-blooded manhood, Jean LaFarr had wasted away to a white-faced shell of a man, who would have tipped the scales at little more than one hundred and fifty pounds. Jean LaFarr knew this, of course. He knew, too, that only by the rarest of good fortune could he expect to reach the settlement at Moose River alive. With luck he could do it. But of late, luck and Jean LaFarr had been complete strangers.

When the weary traveler made camp that night, his little cabin on the opposite side of the narrow valley seemed so close that he could almost touch it with outstretched hand. During that first day he had traveled little more than five miles. He built a fire, melted snow and made several pots of spruce tea. He drank this bitter stuff until his impatient stomach refused to stand more of it. Then, for long, he sat before a roaring fire, nursing his aching limbs. The scurvy had settled about his knees, now. The pain brought cold sweat out upon his face.

On all sides, shadowy gray forms sped swiftly back and forth through the tongues of light cast by the fire. All day, the wolves had followed him. But it was not himself they were after. They wanted the meat on his back. He could not part with that meat, however, even if he had been so minded. That single bit of jerked beef might well stand between him and death. Even if he should seek to purchase freedom from molestation by offering the gaunt gray devils that meat, they would not be satisfied. Well he knew. They would look for more meat. They would follow him until—

He attempted to shrug away the unpleasant picture conjured up by his active imagination. It was common belief that wolves would not attack man. This probably held true in a land where there were many men and where the wolves knew men and feared them. But up here where, chances were, no man except himself had ever set foot, the situation was different. These wolves feared man no more than they feared any other living thing whose manner of fighting was different than their own—the mountain lion, for instance, or the bull moose, or the grizzly bear. Maddened by the hunger urge, the vicious gray devils would attack any of these redoubtable fighters.

Jean LaFarr sat well into the night before his blazing fire. He finally slept, uncomfortably huddled, back against a moss-covered rock. He awoke in the gray dawn, chilled to the bone and oppressed with a shuddering sense of danger. A single coal shone like a gleaming red eye in the pile of gray ash that had been the fire. Fanned by icy blasts, this last burning remnant gave forth sporadic gusts of smoke. This smoke was whisked in his direction.

Less than a dozen feet away, six gray wolves crouched in a loose half circle just beyond the fire. Through half-closed lids Jean LaFarr watched them. They were waiting for that last smoldering spark to die. Dreading fire as do all wilderness dwellers, they had probably crouched there for hours, drawing nearer and nearer as the fire dwindled, but failing to muster courage to attack their sleeping victim, so long as even a suspicion of fire intervened.

A shudder, due not altogether to the cold, rippled up and down Jean LaFarr's back. He reached stealthily for his rifle. A dozen fierce eyes watched his every move. With numbed fingers combating his efforts, he removed the rifle from its protective casing of caribou hide, inched it about until the gun's black barrel unwaveringly indicated the nearest of the ominous gray shapes.

In response to his first shot the snarling gray target, struck in the chest by the high-powered rifle bullet, catapulted backward into the snow. Even as it struggled feebly, a snarling, slashing tangle of gray bodies pounced upon it. In an instant the dying wolf was torn apart; in another instant, devoured.

Jean LaFarr watched the horrible feast with a sort of terrible fascination. When he sought to shift the gun about, he found that his hand had slid away from that narrow space on the barrel which was protected by a band of fur. The palm of his hand was frozen to the blue gun barrel. When he pulled his hand away the skin from his fingers and palm stuck to the gun. He grinned mirthlessly. "Dere ees one piece of Jean LaFarr you gray devils won't get," he muttered, still smiling. "De skin from Jean, she stick to de gun, see. You weel not come near the gun even after Jean ees gone. No, no."

He broke into a cackling laugh at his own gruesome joke. Sound of that unnatural laughter somehow aroused him from the cloying lethargy into which his seemingly hopeless situation had cast him. He shrugged his angular shoulders violently.

"Come, come, what's de matter here? Jean, you damn fool, will you den willingly become meat for dees gray devils? Jean LaFarr, Grizzly of the Karoketts! Food for de wolf! Ha, ha—good joke, eh. But no, not to-day, my frien's. Tomorrow, maybe. Yes, yes—maybe tomorrow—"

He lifted the rifle to his shoulder, sighted carefully and fired, once, twice,

thrice, in slow succession. In response to each shot a wolf sprawled in the snow, kicking in death agony.

Without waiting to observe the results of the shots, the trapper struggled painfully to his feet and limped away across the white barrens.

It was evening of the third day that Jean LaFarr, standing atop a wind-swept ridge, discovered a thin streamer of smoke, snaking skyward from out a cluster of snow covered spruces, on the opposite side of a cup-shaped valley. For nearly an hour he stood there, striving to confirm that first evidence of his dizzy senses. It was too good to be true—a man, away up here in this untrod wilderness! But there was no question. There it was, a thin, blue ribbon of smoke. A campfire! A fellow man! Food!

With dizzy eyes that oftentimes refused his bidding, he measured the distance across the valley a hundred times. Could he make it? He shrugged, doubtfully. He had eaten nothing for forty-eight hours. He was very weak, and sick. Oftentimes, during the past two days, he had wandered aimlessly, a pain-racked, soul-tortured atom, on a sea of illimitable whiteness. Always the wolves had followed him; always they drew near when his frequent spells of sickness caused him to stop; always they drew away, reluctantly, when he stumbled on.

Irresponsible though his actions were, sick though he might be, at no time was he oblivious to those slinking gray shapes. They knew it, the green-eyed devils. They were watching, waiting for him to slip, or stumble, and lose his footing. Then, the instant he was for a moment helpless, they would rush him. Jean LaFarr knew.

But they would never get him, those gray devils. No, no—Jean LaFarr was too smart for such as they. There were still ten cartridges for the rifle. And over there, just across the valley, was safety, rest and food. It could not be more than five miles as the crow might fly. Five miles—a mere step for Jean LaFarr. . . . Jean LaFarr, who owned no master in the long traverse with snowshoes.

His first impulse was to put forth the last of his waning strength in a single spurt. It was only with a very real effort that he combated this suicidal urge. To hurry would be fatal. He must conserve his strength, travel slowly and carefully, very, very carefully. To stumble, to fall, would mean the end for Jean LaFarr.

So it was that, when he finally started away, he moved very, very slowly indeed, stumbling, gropingly, like an old, stoop-shouldered man. Straight across the valley he set his course, guided by that streamer of smoke. Frantic with dread lest he should miss that hazy beacon, he dared not take his eyes from it. The result was that his progress was labored, and painfully slow. Snow-covered rocks, unseen in the shadowless grayness, jutted up in his path. Snow hidden briar tangles clutched at his legs and sought to trip him.

Winter nights in the Northland are never black; so it was, that that thin streamer of smoke guided him until far into the night. When the smoke finally virtually disappeared as the campers' fire dwindled, he was, fortunately, on comparatively high ground, hence able to direct his course by the clump of snow-covered firs, every feature of which had become familiar, due to his constant watching. Buoyed up by hope, an unnatural strength filled his weakened body; the dizziness miraculously left him.

But it was soon evident, even in the face of the new optimism that possessed him, that he would need all of this flare of strength to reach his objective. For he had sadly underestimated the distance across the valley. By the time the faintly increasing brightness, heralding the approach of a new day, appeared along the eastern horizon, he had covered little more than half the distance.

Soon, a new smoke cloud appeared. The campers were up and about preparing breakfast, getting ready for a new day. The frantic trapper put forth his utmost in one last valiant attempt. He *must* reach that camp! Chances were, those men were transients and would start away as soon as they had eaten.

Abruptly, the spanking report of a rifle

sounded, some distance away on his right. And then, there were other reports—on his left. The Frenchman's unnaturally alert senses quickly interpreted the cause of these shots. The men had started out in search of fresh meat. Perhaps they had found meat; more likely, however, they were shooting at the wolves.

And then for an instant, the desperate man was overcome with fear lest the campers should leave. He cried out hoarsely; danced about on the icy whiteness like a mad thing. The gaunt, gray watchers, skulking in the shadows, crouched on haunches, and, red tongues lolling, watched these mad antics with silent appraisal. His hoarse voice seemed to carry no farther than the nearest thicket edge. Unreasoning panic seized upon the frantic man. He lifted his rifle and fired it into the air several times, then stumbled on, slipping, sliding, falling, but always scrambling to his feet and moving onward.

It was nearly midday when Jean LaFarr reached that clump of spruce in the center of which a tiny fire still smoldered. The sturdy little lean-to built against the rocky wall was deserted.

Breathing hard in short, shuddering gasps, Jean LaFarr stood there, swaying gently to and fro, his bloodshot eyes searching hungrily here and there for some scrap of food which the campers might have left. A single glance assured him that the wolves had been there before him. The snow was dotted thickly with their footprints.

Warding off the collapse which momentarily threatened, the trapper sought wildly for some way out of this last misfortune. They must have heard his shots. Yes, yes, of course; but there were at least two men here; each had thought the other had fired the shots which had in reality been fired by Jean LaFarr. Yes, that was it. It was all very simple. They had not purposefully run away from him. No, men did not do things like that. Only dogs ran away. Loup, for instance—

Suddenly, Jean LaFarr began to laugh. There was no human quality to that laughter. It was the squalling, voiceless protest of a mad thing. And, just for an instant, Jean LaFarr *was* mad. Then the life seemed to ooze out of his weakened body. He slumped forward on his knees. The rifle dropped from his cold fingers. Out there at the thicket edge, green, almond-shaped eyes watched hungrily.

There came the swish of swift feet through the snow. A lean gray body hurtled through the air. White fangs slashed at the tiny pack on the man's back, which still retained the odor of the meat it had once held. Force of the wolf's flying attack knocked the man head foremost into the snow.

And then, Jean LaFarr screamed. A horrible sound was that scream. Two other lank, gray shapes paused in midstride and stood watching, wondering no doubt, if that human thing which contained such a vast store of life was about to call upon still another hidden reservoir of energy.

Jean LaFarr came up on an elbow. Inch by inch he worked to his knees. His frost-bitten face twitched and grimaced convulsively. His red-rimmed eyes stared wildly. His cold fingers touched the familiar rifle. Sanity returned to him, then. He, fumbling, picked up the gun and crawled on hands and knees across the rod wide open space toward the deserted lean-to. Here he set his back against the outside of the man-made shelter and faced his enemies.

With painstaking care he counted the shells for his gun. There were five left—just five. He steadied his swaying body against the wall of the lean-to, and brought the rifle slowly to his shoulder. For a long minute he tried to find the sights. Failing in this, he finally fired in the general direction of three, still, gray shapes. Not one of the three wolves moved. He had missed!

This circumstance served in an amazing manner to clear his befuddled sense. There were now only four shots left in the rifle. They would get him, of course. But he had promised himself five dead wolves. After that, they were welcome to what was left of Jean LaFarr. But five—yes, yes, he should get five of them.

As though sensing the man's uncertain-

ty, the wolves drew nearer. The trapper counted the swift moving bodies. One, two, three, four . . . seven, eight—there were nine of them—two packs. There were seldom more than three or four wolves to a pack. Two of these packs had then joined forces, to feast upon his fleshless bones. He laughed harshly. Once again he laboriously brought the rifle to his shoulder.

But, just as he was about to pull the trigger, his attention was distracted by a flash of swift movement at his left. He turned his head slightly and laughed again as he identified the cause of this movement. More wolves! Four of them. Perhaps more. He again sighted carefully along the rifle's black barrel.

This time a wolf dropped when he fired. After an appreciable interval he fired again . . . again, and still again. In response to each shot a gray body became a lifeless clod of skin and bone. When he pulled the trigger once more the hammer clicked on an empty shell. Ah, that was the last. It would then, be all over soon. Slowly, methodically, he slippped the mitten on his right hand, and, grasping the rifle by the barrel, waited calmly.

In an amazingly short space of time, the last of the four dead wolves had been devoured. Their ravishing hunger merely whetted by the taste of blood, the pack drew near, fearlessly now, as though sensing their victim's comparative helplessness. Jean LaFarr knew the way of wolves. Some one of them, the recognized leader of the three packs, would attack him, first. If by some lucky chance he were able to dispose of that first one with his clubbed rifle, then a second, ranking next in valiancy, would rush him. And so it would go. The instant he was dragged down, the pack would rush, en masse.

As the beleaguered man had figured, a gaunt, battle-scarred wolf separated himself from the rest, and, crouching low, belly hugging the snow, crept across the trampled open. And then, without the slightest warning, the pack leader sprang. Jean LaFarr struck out blindly. The rifle struck the wolf glancingly along the flank. There was little power behind the blow. There was just enough, however, to turn the beast aside, ever so slightly.

As it was, Jean LaFarr felt the animal's hot breath on his cheek as it hurtled past him. The man turned half about and struck out blindly as the pack leader struggled to extricate himself from the interlacing limbs of the lean-to. There was little force to the blow. The battle-scarred wolf backed away, seemingly grinning at the man's futile efforts.

And then, a great weight fell upon him.

Jean LaFarr turned quickly, as he sensed, rather than saw, the inception of a flank attack. Two wolves were approaching him from two sides at once. One of them sprang. A split second later, a second and a third sprang. Yelling hoarsely, he poked weakly at the nearest of the flying gray shapes with the gun barrel.

Something sharp seared to the bone along his shoulder with no sensation of pain. He threw an arm across his throat. A white fang slashed at this arm, ripping the already tattered mackinaw. Then there sounded, directly across his body as he lay there flat on his back, a growl of rage and pain. The body of the battle-scarred old pack leader sprawled in the snow, less than a foot away. The old wolf's throat was torn and bleeding.

And then, Jean LaFarr saw: the two other wolves which had attacked him engaged in deadly combat with—Loup. But no, another wolf? A renegade? Even as this thought crossed his mind, however, Jean LaFarr knew that that white beast was not a wolf. There was no wolf in the Yukon as big as Loup. The man tried to call out but no sound came from his white lips.

Even as he stared, fascinated, that uneven battle was over. Two gray shapes lay writhing in the snow, and Loup, turning swiftly, met a hurtling gray body in mid-air. So swift and sure was that slashing aerial attack, that Jean LaFarr's slow eyes failed adequately to picture it. A single flash of white teeth, slashing upward, and the gray wolf joined its three companions on the red-splotched snow.

With a superhuman effort Jean LaFarr struggled to his feet. Even as the rest of the wolves bunched for the attack, the man stumbled forward and stood beside the white wolf dog's tense body. And then, as though sensing its master's helplessness in this crisis, the white dog sprang forward, meeting the wolves halfway. Instantly, the valiant animal was hidden beneath a pyramid of writhing gray shapes. Jean LaFarr willed to go to his dog's assistance, but this time his exhausted body refused his bidding. His knees crumpled, and, sobbing impotently, he fell forward.

A struggling white shape, streaked with blood, freed itself briefly from the tangle of fighting bodies. With a flirt of its shaggy head, the white killer tossed a clinging gray shape asprawl in the red snow. Almost immediately, however, the valiant beast was overwhelmed. Briefly, the scene swam in a red blur before Jean LaFarr's dizzy eyes, then the snapping crack of rifle shots near at hand aroused him. Men, shouting! More shots! He struggled to hands and knees. "Loup!" he called hoarsely, "Loup!"

A hard muzzle, covered with a warm, sticky substance brushed his cheek. He threw an arm about the white wolf dog's neck and clung tightly.

For some time the shots continued, followed by the staccato yelps of injured wolves. Then, strong arms circled Jean LaFarr's hunger-ravished body. Fur-clad figures danced in a formless blur before his eyes. Friendly voices sounded in his ears. They were talking, explaining:

". . . We heard the shots. The wolves were so thick we guessed someone was in trouble. A dozen of 'em, easy. Never saw so many—"

But Jean LaFarr was not listening. He crouched in the snow, an arm about the white wolf dog's shaggy body. He was pointing to an eight-inch scar, recently healed, almost circling the big dog's throat.

"My Loup. He don' run away from me. No, no—he ees hurt. You see it here on hees neck. A ver' bad hurt, for sure, m'sieu. My Loup, he crawl away to get well. An' now—jus' in time—he come back . . . to Jean."

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By L. R. Sherman

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THOUGH it made a brave attempt to be alluring, the Cantina del Desierto on the Mexican side of the little town of San Luis was as drab as the desert after which it was named. The adobe walls of the long, low room, which had once been white-washed, were a dirty gray. A dilapidated American bar extended part way along one wall. Small round tables, their edges serrated by charred furrows from countless cigarettes and their tops whitened by mescal and tequila, were scattered about the dirt floor.

Women of the shadows, with their shiny black hair and short, brightly colored skirts—all of them mere girls and some still pretty—flashed their white teeth and dark eyes in mechanical smiles, or brazenly seated themselves at the tables occupied by those of the habitués who seemed to possess money. The air was sour with the smell of cigarette smoke, spilled mescal and stale beer and, to one entering from the clean night air, seemed like the fetid breath of a carnivore.

In a corner near the door the only American in the place was seated alone behind one of the small tables. His leather chaps, high-heeled boots, and soft, broad-brimmed gray sombrero advertised his calling. The black butts of twin Colts, with their holsters tied to his thighs beneath crossed cartridge belts, told that his mission was not one of pleasure.

The dim light of the oil lamps did not bring out the fine lines etched on his darkly tanned features by sun, and wind, and rain, but they did expose the sternness of his long jaw, his thin, somewhat cruel lips and his narrow, high-arched nose. Cold, gray eyes, glinting through the narrow triangular slits of half-lowered lids, missed nothing in their quick appraisal of each newcomer. It was evident that he awaited somebody who was long in arriving, for he had been seated there with scarcely a change of position since early in the evening.

A whiskey glass rested in front of him. It had been filled and emptied several times. Apparently the fiery liquor had had no effect other than to make the man appear more taciturn, more watchful, more hawklike. For an hour he had not had the glass refilled.

One of the short-skirted, sleek-haired birds of prey had slid into a chair opposite him, with a flashing of white teeth and a soft-voiced invitation. At first he

had paid no attention to her beyond a snapped "Vamos." She had persisted in her efforts to enamor him until, with the swiftness of a striking snake, he had shot a brown hand across the table and grasped her arm none too gently.

"I said 'NO'!" he grated. "Now get out! *Quitete!*"

He had offered her no violence beyond the grip on her arm, yet there was that in his voice and in the gray-eyed stare that made the girl shiver and arise with the haste of one seeking escape from death. She departed hurriedly. Others had witnessed the encounter and the stranger was left alone thereafter.

The night sounds of San Luis reached their height. Now and then there was a yell and the noise of a brawl from some place toward the other end of the town. Once several revolver shots rang out from the opposite side of the short main street. A mescal crazed native passed the building, yelling and cursing. The white man gave not the slightest indication that he had heard these sounds; yet when, during a momentary lull of the noise within the room, the name of "El Sabre" became audible, his hard eyes shifted quickly toward the four swarthy Mexicans seated at a table against the wall twenty feet away.

These men were somewhat different from those seated at the other tables. They had money and spent it recklessly. There was a semblance of uniform about their attire. Each wore a bandolier of cartridges over one shoulder, and below the gaily colored sash about each waist hung a knife, and bone- or ivory-handled revolvers. Insurrecto was written large in every posing attitude and loud-voiced boast. It was evident that they belonged to one of the many small bands of marauding rebels who raided along both sides of the Border.

Once more there was an interval of quiet, and during that interval came the sound of pounding hoofs. They swung around to the rear of the building and stopped. A little later the door was thrown open and a specimen of Mexican dandy stalked into the room.

From high-crowned, concha-trimmed sombrero to bright, silver-roweled spurs he displayed the love of his race for gaudy colors and showy ornamentation. Over a silk shirt was a closely fitting vest of dark red velvet bordered with gold braid, with a single row of large, ornate gold buttons down each front edge. A red and green silk sash covered the top of his tightly fitting, wide-bottomed, slashed trousers. The grips of the two revolvers that hung below the sash were of mother-of-pearl. He was taller than most of his countrymen and not unhandsome in a somewhat effeminate way, but his swarthy, finely chiseled features and dark, piercing eyes spoke of a crafty, cruel and treacherous nature. He was a desert hawk in the garb of a parrakeet.

"El Sabre!" cried one of the men at the table, jumping up and raising his glass in salute.

At the cry everyone in the room arose and responded to the toast to a marauding robber whom the peons admired and feared; that is everyone but the cowboy in the corner. He arose, but instead of raising his glass he leaned back against the adobe wall, mechanically rolling himself a cigarette. His narrow, gray-eyed gaze bored into the back of the Mexican dandy, who bowed in response to the toast and then drew himself erect until a chair was placed for him at the opposite side of the table.

He seated himself, called for all to drink at his expense, and then, with an imperious gesture, waved away those who had crowded around the table. When the group was alone he leaned forward, speaking swiftly in low tones. The others bent their heads to catch his words.

At this point the tall cowpuncher walked toward them, his eyes on the leader and a puzzled frown appearing on his forehead. As he moved forward he heard the word "gringo" accompanied by Spanish curses. None of those at the table noticed him until he was directly in front of El Sabre. The thumb and forefinger of his left hand were concealed in the pocket of his vest. The thumb of his right hand was loosely hooked in his cartridge belt, and the fingers of that hand

were half curled just above a black gun butt.

"You—greaser!"

At the low, sharp words those at the table looked up quickly. There were muttered curses and hands slipped out of sight, reaching for weapons. The right hand of the white man slid down and out in a smooth, swiftly gliding movement and in it appeared a heavy forty-four.

"Hands on th' table, empty! Pronto!"

The black muzzle of the gun was slightly raised, and each insurrecto knew that it would snap into line with a thunderous discharge at the first overt move. Their hands immediately came above the top of the table, and they were empty.

The swarthy features of the dandy had taken on a lighter shade, and into his eyes came the look of a trapped animal, frightened yet filled with hate; for it was to him the stranger had addressed his sharp words.

"Señor Shot Starke?" he half whispered.

"Ever see this before?" the white man demanded, disregarding the Mexican's recognition.

Removing his left hand from his vest pocket he tossed on the table a short length of intricately formed, silver spur chain. The Mexican stared at it in perplexity for a moment and then slowly shook his head.

"Maybe this'll help you to remember," snapped Starke, and again he tossed a small, glittering object in front of El Sabre.

It was a gold button of fancy pattern. Subconsciously the bandit leader's hand moved up to the spot on his vest where one of his buttons was missing. That on the table was an exact duplicate of those on the garment. Shot saw the movement and the big Colts centered on the outlaw leader.

"That spur chain belonged to Jim Travers, my partner in th' Flyin' Q. I found both of them things at th' water hole south of th' ranch. Th' sod was some scarred up so I know he put up a fight, but there was too many for him. Saw you once, and remembered that vest. Reckon he's dead by this time, so I figured on sendin' a few Greasers to hell for him to play with."

Starke's other gun was out now and he had stepped back a pace. El Sabre licked his dry lips and drew a sharp breath, but no words came.

"If you got anythin' to say, talk fast," snapped Shot.

The Mexican tried again, and this time words came haltingly.

"You . . . you deed not get my note? No?"

As El Sabre asked the question he gave an apparently careless wave of his hand. In accepting that gesture at face value Starke ignored what should have been a warning to him. Behind him a face disappeared from the window flanking the door.

"No!"

Interrogation as well as denial was contained in Shot's answer.

"Ah," with a spreading of his hands in a typical Spanish gesture, "then that explains thees visit. Señor Travers is not harm'. He ees well an' safe. We hold him only for the ransom."

A measure of assurance seemed to have returned to the rebel chief and, without knowing why, this somehow disturbed the alert rancher. His keen glance traveled quickly around the table. None of the hands had disappeared beneath its top, yet Shot scented danger close by. Then the glance of El Sabre focussed on a point behind Starke and the Mexican could not conceal the glitter of triumph that came to his eyes.

"Look out!"

The exclamation was a shrill scream from one of the girls, and at the same time a bottle spun through the air. With the first shifting of the Mexican's glance Shot ducked and whirled. Had not that bottle connected with its intended victim the American would have been too late. Almost at his feet pitched the body of an unconscious rebel who had crept noiselessly in from the street, and close to his outstretched arm lay a long knife. The blood from his cut scalp mingled with pieces of broken glass. Curiously, the

girl who had thrown the bottle was the one whom, earlier in the evening, Starke had ordered away from his table.

Shot's quick glance at the man told him it was a vaquero he had discharged from the Flying Q several months before.

Instantly conscious of his danger, Starke whirled back, leaping toward the door at the same time. He was almost too late. A gun spat fire and he felt the tug at his hat as the bullet passed through the crown.

Then his own two heavy guns thundered their response while he backed quickly to the door. One of the Mexicans dropped forward, his head rapping the table top sharply, and another cursed as he let go of his gun and grasped his left shoulder. Two more shots from the bandits' guns sang by Shot and another passed through his vest, nipping his shoulder. Then he backed out into the night.

As he turned toward the window there came a series of crashes and the lights went out. He swung to face the door, crouching low and waiting for the appearance of the first Mexican. There was a confusion of sounds from inside the adobe walls, but no one approached the opening. For some moments he waited patiently and then, from the rear of the building came the beat of horses' hoofs that gradually receded to silence.

The lights within the room again appeared and, cautiously glancing through the small window, Shot saw that the only members of El Sabre's band who were left were the one who still lay motionless with his head resting on the table, and the one with the cut scalp who lay on the floor. The others had retreated through a rear door. Cursing softly to himself, he turned toward the hitching-rack where his big bay stood patiently waiting.

A half hour later Shot made his camp at a well concealed water hole on the American side. For a long time after he had finished his meal he sat gazing thoughtfully into the greasewood fire. The frown of perplexity that had crossed his features when he approached El Sabre that evening had returned.

"That's th' second time I've seen that greaser an' both times I had th' idea I'd seen him some place before—a long time ago. Yet I know I haven't," he muttered to himself, with a half angry shake of his head.

But the impression would not go away. There was something about the dark, treacherous eyes and the thin, cruel lips that he recognized. A picture formed vaguely before his mental vision, yet it was so indistinct as to be unrecognizable. That it was some man he had met and known he felt certain, yet the image could not be made clearer. With a grunt of disgust he forced himself to think of his partner.

Here also Shot was baffled. El Sabre had mentioned a note which he should have received; a note demanding a ransom for Jim. He had made a hurried visit to the ranch house but a short time before leaving for San Luis in search of the bandit, but had been told of no message waiting for him. And he could not quite believe the Mexican was holding Travers solely for ransom. There was something else.

At last he arose and wrapped himself in his blankets. He could not abandon the idea that there was more to Jim's disappearance than appeared on the surface, and fell asleep still thinking about it.

A part of the solution came to him the next morning shortly after he awoke. There was no note; never had been. Travers was not being held in order to get ransom. That statement of El Sabre's was merely his quickly thought out play for gaining time, so that his henchman might slip up behind and knife the American. It was a play for the few moments respite from death at Shot's hands, by which the bandit leader might save his own life.

But there was still the question of why the Mexican was holding Jim, and the strange resemblance of El Sabre to some one he could not identify. Thought of the man who had tried to knife him, and recollection that the fellow had been discharged for cruelty to his horse, but complicated the problem.

Something told him that Jim was not

dead. Had they meant to kill him, they would have done so where Shot had found the spur chain and button. Why then were they holding him? For information? That thought sent Shot Starke bolting down his breakfast and hurrying to his horse. He knew something of a Mexican's methods of gaining information from an obdurate captive.

The sun was just shoving its way above the skyline when he mounted and headed for San Luis. Directly behind the adobe cantina within which had taken place the fight the evening before, he picked up the trail of four horses heading toward the southwest. Sixty miles away rugged mountains loomed up, seeming in the clear air to be not more than ten miles distant. Barren, rock-strewn foothills, dry arroyos, and cactus-covered sand were the vanguards thrown out in front of these mountains to discourage their closer inspection.

Starke knew a little of the country. He never forgot a trail he had once taken, and there was one spot, deep in the foothills, that he could not forget if he tried. Could it be possible that the present trail would lead him to that place, he wondered. Thoughtfully, he glanced back toward the mud houses of the little town he had left.

A movement attracted his attention and he concentrated his gaze. A horseman was leaving town, riding along the trail he himself was following. He waited, but the rider did not come close. He swung to the north and passed Starke nearly a quarter of a mile away. The rancher's eyes narrowed. Beneath the wide brim of the man's sombrero he had glimpsed a bit of white, as if a bandage were worn under the hat. He recalled that, so far as he knew, the only living member of El Sabre's band left at San Luis had been the one whose head had been hit with a bottle.

At the next rise he saw that the rider had returned to the trail and was racing his horse. Shot did not try to catch him, but continued at a steady lope which would keep the other in sight for some time. He had seen the other's horse and knew that he would kill his own if he tried to pursue. Those bandits rode the cream of the ranges.

Before noon the Mexican had dropped out of sight for the last time, but by that time Starke understood where the man was going; knew that he was riding to warn El Sabre of the rancher's approach and that El Sabre's hangout was the little cabin deep in the foothills where Shot had been before. And he knew now of whom El Sabre reminded him, and something of why the Mexican was holding his partner.

By late afternoon he had entered the rugged hills. Here he commenced to circle to the northwest and when he came to a low, shelving-sided canyon leading south, he descended to its floor and turned back toward the trail he had left. In the last light of day he halted within the concealment of a clump of cottonwoods and drew a pair of binoculars from a saddle pocket. Ahead of him and to the west was a high, barren hill. Turning the glasses toward the crown of this hill he gave it a long, careful inspection and then he replaced the glasses, smiling grimly.

He dismounted and cautiously moved nearer the hill. Before he had reached its base, darkness had settled and he worked toward the summit with all the care and noiselessness of a stalking Apache. At last there was only a large boulder between him and the highest point of the hill. A slight breeze from the south brought with it the odor of burning tobacco. He slowly circled the rock, and less than ten feet away, saw a man with a white bandage around his head, seated, with a rifle across his knees.

"Stick 'em up, Pedro!"

At the sharp command the Mexican uttered a short, startled, high-pitched yell and then drew in a long breath. The muzzle of Shot's six-gun was pressed against his spine.

"One more yip like that, an' I'll bore you, greaser," he snapped savagely.

The breath was expelled with a soft whistling noise and the man's hands shot above his head. Two minutes later his arms were bound behind his back, his feet were lashed together, and Shot was pos-

sessed of an additional rifle, a knife, and a pair of bone-handled revolvers.

"How many has El Sabre got at th' cabin?"

"*Quien sabe,*" muttered the shifty-eyed Mexican.

Starke placed the knife at the man's throat, and his eyes were twin slits from which a cold fire seemed to dart.

"I'd just as soon slit your throat as eat, greaser. Answer me!"

There was no lack of conviction in the white man's tone, and the captive hastened to reply, his voice trembling slightly with apprehension as the knife pricked the skin.

"Four, an' El Sabre," he whispered.

"Where's th' rest of th' band?"

"El Sabre have send them south to join Quatrille in battle against the federals."

"Who's th' one that wasn't with El Sabre at San Luis?"

"He's been stay behin' to watch Señor Travers."

"Then Jim's still alive?"

A note of eagerness had crept into Starke's voice. The captive nodded sullenly.

"Greaser, if you've lied to me I'm comin' back to finish the job on your throat that I mentioned," Shot whispered fiercely.

Cutting a strip from the man's shirt, he tied an effective gag between the prisoner's jaws and then hurried back to his horse.

He rode cautiously, rounding the southern base of the hill on whose crown lay his captive, and entering a well defined trail leading to the west. For a while he threaded his way along a wide-walled valley. When the walls converged to form a narrow canyon he dismounted and, fastening the horse to a low bush, again crept forward on foot.

The canyon opened into a grass-floored pocket. He could just make out the grayish red walls of an adobe cabin, lighter than the surrounding cliffs. Not a light was to be seen. Shot chuckled softly. Evidently that single, piercing yell of the sentinel on the hill had been heard. They were waiting for him.

Feeling his way along, he crept close to the wall. He found a bench and his exploring hands touched a tin bucket on top of it. Next to the pail his fingers came in contact with a curtain, evidently an old serape hanging over the doorway, he thought. He silently made his way around to the side where he knew there was a window. This also was covered with cloth.

For a long moment he listened. He imagined he could hear faint breathing within, but no movement. Then came a softly muttered Spanish curse. He listened further, trying to locate the various people in the room by such slight sounds as they made from time to time, but the effort was useless. Jim was in there, and he dared not start hostilities without knowing his partner's exact position.

He smiled grimly as an idea came to him, and from one of the pockets of his overalls he drew a spool of coarse linen thread. For nearly a quarter of an hour he was noiselessly busy and then he retreated slowly toward the canyon.

When he finally reached his horse he unfastened an old coat from behind the cantle. He slipped into this, being careful that his gun butts were clear of its lower edge. Then, after one or two other adjustments, he mounted and started up the canyon.

"Reckon th' old trick's good as ever," he muttered, giving his shoulders a shrug to settle them more comfortably inside the coat.

The bright stars shed but little light to the rock-strewn floor of the narrow gorge, and it was impossible for Starke to pick his way or for the horse to travel without considerable noise. This did not seem to alarm the rider. In fact, just as they came to the mouth of the circular pocket in which stood the cabin, he tickled his mount's ribs with a spur and reined him a little to one side. The horse plunged, struck some loose, rocky rubble, stumbled and regained his balance with a snort that could be heard half a mile. Shot grinned, rode a few rods farther, and dismounted in front of the adobe hut.

"H'm, all dark. Don't reckon anybody's home," he said aloud as though speaking to himself.

Jerking aside the cloth in front of the door he stepped into the single room.

"Jim, are you here?" he called in a low voice.

Something was jammed hard against his ribs, and it took no deep reasoning to tell him that it was the muzzle of a gun.

"One leetle move, an' you die, señor," hissed a voice close to his ear.

Shot froze, motionless, after raising his hands a little above his shoulders.

Someone struck a match in the center of the room and one of the two lamps standing on a rickety table was lighted. For a second the light half blinded Shot, and in that instant his two guns were plucked from their holsters and the pressure of the rifle in his side was withdrawn.

He looked around slowly and the first object that caught his eyes was a bound, half-naked form crouched in one corner. A dirty rag had been tied between the man's jaws so as to render speech impossible. Close to him, with gun trained on his breast, stood one of the squat, dark-skinned Mexicans, his lips parted from crooked, discolored teeth in a grin that told how much he wished the victim had given some sound of warning, that he might have had excuse to shoot.

At first Shot did not recognize the prisoner. His face was puffed and discolored; his clothes hung in rags, and what could be seen of his torso was a mass of contusions, bloody welts and unhealed scars. Only the eyes were alive, and they seemed to be begging forgiveness for the absence of a warning which, had he given it, would have meant his death.

Starke stared, and for a moment it seemed that his self-possession would leave him completely. The guards who had covered him when he entered had stepped back a little as though, even after he had been disarmed, they feared to come too close. Their guns were still trained on him and when they caught the look that swept over his face at the sight of his partner's plight, their fingers took up the slack on the triggers. Just when the least additional fraction of pressure would have discharged the pieces, Shot's clenched hands relaxed, his eyes shifted from contemplation of his partner and lost the fire that had lighted them, and his jaw muscles ceased to bulge quite so prominently. Only the grayness that had crept up beneath the skin did not recede.

When he looked at the sneering, evil face of El Sabre who stood behind the table, a mask had been drawn across his face. No slightest sign of the storm that must be raging within showed on the surface.

"Well, now that you got me, greaser, what do you want?"

Even his voice was low and level and without a tremor.

"There ees the little matter of killing one of my mos' trusted men in San Luis, for which the Señor Starke should pay weeth his life. But first I have a story to tell."

The mocking smile that had lit El Sabre's eyes was gone. With the last sentence he made a theatrical gesture. It was evident the Latin love for the dramatic could not be denied.

"Maybe I'd rather be shot before hearin' th' story," Starke remarked with a grim humor of which there was no evidence in his masklike features.

"You weel be kill', but you weel not be shot, an' not before I feenish," the other hissed in a flame of sudden anger.

"Well, get it over with," the tall American enjoined.

Without a glance at the bandits on each side, who still had him covered with their carbines, he walked over to the window, lowered his hands, and placed them behind him, leaning back in an indolent attitude.

"Two years ago my brother, who ees known as El Tigre, an' who weeth hees leetle army is love' by the peons—for he hate the rich an' give to the poor—ees in need of horses. He go over to the other side and take some from a damn gringo, an' he have the bad luck to keel one man who try to stop heem. Sacre—that damn gringo he then come across on thees side,

to thees very so humble hacienda, an' make El Tigre a captive. He have weeth him a traitor of my brother's who show heem the way. That traitor has already pay."

El Sabre made a significant motion, indicative of the horrible death to which the Mexican informant had been condemned, and his black eyes lit with savage pleasure as though he wished to inform Starke that such a death would be his. Shot did not give the slightest intimation that he understood the implication.

"Before thees traitor pay to me for what he have done," El Sabre continued, growing more vehement in gesture and tone, "he, to buy off hees life, geeve me a description of that gringo, but he did not know hees name. He tell me my brother try to buy his leeberty from thees man who capture him by telling the gringo where he ees hide the much gold he has capture', but thees traitor he do not hear where the gold ees hid. That gringo, so contemptible like the snake, don't let heem go, an El Tigre ees hung like the dog."

The Mexican's voice, quivering with self-induced emotion, arose to a scream as he finished, and for some moments he was unable to go on. He almost frothed at the mouth from the frenzy into which he had worked himself. He pointed a trembling finger at Shot.

"Once I have seen you, señor, an' I am recognize the likeness to that gringo. I learn you have not been in Mexico for two year, so eef you are that gringo the gold ees maybe still hid. I plan; I wait for my revenge I am swear to have, an' finally I go over. I theenk to capture you, but I mistake an' get your frien'. It ees jus' as good. I make heem tell eef you are the man an' where ees the gold, I theenk. But he ees stubborn. Maybe one, two leetle more days he tell, but now eet ees not necessary. There ees another way."

The Mexican smiled in anticipation, and into his black eyes had flamed an unholy light of blood lust.

For a moment Starke did not reply. He had not glanced toward his partner after that first long look. He did not dare look now. Only too well did he realize what Jim had endured rather than make any admission that might subject his friend to a lingering, torture-worn death more horrible than any punishment which would be inflicted upon himself for the purpose of gaining information.

When the turmoil within Starke had subsided sufficiently to allow him to speak without betraying his emotion, he asked in a steady voice:

"So you think, as long as you can't make Jim Travers talk, you'll try a little of your damnable persuasion on me?"

El Sabre nodded vehemently, his smile broadening.

"I know you gringos. You are stubborn, but there ees always one way. You have not the brave indifference to blood that have my people. I have seen you white-livered dogs go pale and leave the bull fight when you see a leetle blood. You will not be tortured. No! But your friend will, an' Señor Jim cannot stand so verrie much more. You weel speak the truth, Señor Shot Starke, before your frien' has groan many times."

The mask slipped from Shot's face for an instant and what El Sabre saw there made him take an involuntary step backward. Then it was replaced and through scarcely moving, white lips the rancher spoke sibilantly.

"You yellow-bellied snake, you won't have to go any farther to find out who I am and what I know. I thought your face was familiar. I saw that rat of a brother of yours in your features. He shot my wrangler in the back, as fine an old man as ever lived, and I trailed him to this dump because th' rangers were not allowed to cross the line. If I hadn't wanted him to hang I'd 've shot him before I got back. He did tell me where his gold was, but it didn't do him any good. Jim's never known where the place is and so he couldn't tell you. That gold is still there, but you won't ever get your hands on it."

Shot's fingers, exploring the wall behind his back, touched a fine piece of stout black thread. The Mexican's eyes sparkled with hate.

"We shall see, gringo," he hissed. "Juan do you shoot him eef he moves, an' you Manuel, tie hees hands behind hees back, an' tie together hees feet. We mus' have no interruptions when we work on hees partner. Maybe, after he tells us where ees hid the gold, we let heem go."

The twisted grin with which El Sabre accompanied the last statement gave the lie to his implied promise. Juan brought his rifle up, cocking it. Manuel moved forward with a strip of rawhide in his hands, and the squat Mexican who guarded Jim leaned forward to remove the gag. Shot Starke pulled down with the hand concealed behind him, while his other hand sought the lapel of his short coat and his glance centered on the man who covered him.

Suddenly and without warning there sounded just outside the door a rattling clatter as if someone had thrown a boiler full of old iron down a set of stairs. There was the snort of a frightened horse and the pounding of hoofs as it galloped away.

Three thundering reports broke out and in the light of the perforated lamp's dying flame Juan and the man who leaned over Jim Travers were seen to jackknife at the waist, as the slugs from two forty-fours in Shot Starke's hands crashed into them just above the belt line.

The light flickered out and streaks of red fire shot out of the darkness toward the spot where Shot had been. But he was not there. A quick leap had carried him away from the window, and now he crouched against the wall not far from the door. Again a flame darted out, accompanied by a deafening explosion. Starke fired twice at an invisible point eighteen inches back of the flame, and almost in the same instant moved swiftly along the wall. A groan, followed by a gasping "Madre de Dios," preceded the falling of a man's body. Silence followed.

Then the stillness was broken by the groans of the man on the floor who had evidently been seriously wounded. Suddenly there was a rush and the serape covering the door waved back as two figures started to dart through. Shot fired at the last one, saw him stagger against the wall and then crumple across the doorsill. Running to the opening, he saw the bandit who had been the first through, racing toward the canyon. He fired three times and at the third shot the man pitched forward on his face.

He crouched against the wall outside the hut and reloaded his guns. Then, with a jerk, he tore down the curtain over the door. Hurrying around to the window he yanked off the cloth that covered it and from the outside surveyed the interior of the hut. The faint starlight filtering through the openings disclosed the dim outlines of four motionless men. One, he knew, was Travers. Beside him was the Mexican he had shot first. Near the window was the man, Juan, who had been told to kill him if he made a move, and across the threshold was the last of the two men who had tried to escape. Over near the table was a writhing form that groaned and moved a little.

Starke returned to the door, entered, and lit the lamp which had not been broken by his shot. A quick glance around told him that, with the exception of himself and Travers, the only living man in the hut was El Sabre. He lay on the floor, his arms useless, and from two holes high in each shoulder the blood seeped out and mingled with the dark red of his gaudy vest.

When his partner was released and cared for, Shot turned his attention to the bandit leader.

"You'll live—for awhile," was the rancher's verdict after a brief examination of the bullet wounds.

With a pocket knife and fingers that were none too gentle, he cut away the clothing and with the cleanest of it made pads for the holes and a bandage to hold them in place. When this was done he straightened and looked down at the Mexican.

"Guess I'll make a little speech now," he said grimly.

"If your greaser band hadn't been so scared to come close they might've found my guns under my old coat, and if you hadn't been so set on makin' your own

little oration, you'd 've noticed those bone-handled guns they did get had belonged to your lookout.

"Furthermore an' besides, if you'd 've used your eyes you'd 've seen a little piece of thread that wasn't there before this evening, hanging down inside th' window, an' would have found that it led to a bucket full of rocks perched on th' roof so's a little pull would drop 'em on th' bench. An' if your greaser gunman an' th' rest of you'd been on to your jobs you wouldn't 've taken your eyes off me when th' bucket fell an' scared my horse. Outside of all that, you an' th' rest of th' lizards may've been good men."

Without replying to the muttered curses of the Mexican, Shot went to the door and dragged the body of the dead bandit away from the opening. Raising the flat stone which formed the sill and which the body had covered, he inserted his arm nearly to the elbow, felt around a little in the cavity beneath the stone and finally brought out a large heavy, hide bag. Setting this on the table, he once more looked down at El Sabre.

"I'll tell you now th' rest of what you wanted to know. There's th' gold your brother hid, an' you've probably stepped over its hiding place a thousand times. I didn't come for it before, because I'd refused it as a bribe, an' I wouldn't use it when th' greaser who told me about it to save himself got hung anyway.

"I'm goin' to use it now, an' for th' purpose of gatherin' together a bunch of square, quick-shootin' waddies who won't be afraid to come across the border as often as it's necessary to clean out a few dens of murderin', thievin', women-capturin' snakes like you. I said you'd live for awhile. You will . . . until I get you across th' line. Then you'll answer to th' law for th' murder of that little rancher whose wife you yanked across into Mexico, and who ain't ever been heard from since."

Without paying any attention to the half-hysterical protestations of the thoroughly terrified bandit, Shot turned to his friend.

"Jim, I'll help you out where it's clean an' maybe you c'n sleep an' rest a little under my blankets. You need it. I got some diggin' to do on a new boot hill I've started. When that's done I'll rustle some food and bring up some of this gang's horses that're hid in a little pocket back of this one th' cabin's in. Then we'll hit for home."

Jim Travers' eyes glowed with a strange light that arrested his partner as he was about to step forward.

"Shot," he murmured in a weak voice, "I'm shore proud to call you 'podner.' I'll shore have to take a hand in that gang you spoke about organizing. Reckon whoever this money was taken from'd be right glad to have it spent thataway."

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THE HELL CABIN

By Douglas Mussinon

Hot lead sings a tune with roaring flames in the "Devil's Garden."

THE erratic crash of three shots echoed wildly down the mountainside. The startling sound impelled Sheriff Clint Morgan to halt his swift ascent. But the night silence again hung oppressively over Storm Mountain.

The sheriff, a man of twenty-seven, then plunged headlong among the trees of the forest. The usual grimness of his smooth-shaven face was accentuated. His lips closed in a hard, uncompromising line.

The light from a half moon filtered through the trees. Morgan raced up the mountainside, dodging thick barriers of brush, the perspiration dripping from him. A holstered six-gun swung at each hip.

Sheriff Morgan knew that the forest soon must open on a broad flat which harbored a cabin—the only such shelter on Storm Mountain. Pursuit of Bad-eyed Browder, killer and rustler, and his band, had led the sheriff and his deputy, Lee Kent, to the cabin trail. The two had separated, to approach the cabin from each side. Morgan had dismounted at the edge of the forest . . . then had come the surprising shots. Through the sheriff's mind hummed the question: Had Kent disobeyed orders, advanced quickly and been killed in the shooting?

Lee Kent was twenty-five, and as a brother to Sheriff Morgan. The man in command had charged his eager deputy to wait fifteen minutes before advancing, giving the sheriff time to swing around.

Morgan tore onward. Several hours previously Browder and his four gangsters had killed three men at Red Rock. The outlaw band, which Morgan had sought to capture because of rustling and another recent killing, had swept into town. Storming up to the Blue Moon Saloon, the five had held up the place. In the resultant gunfire two punchers and a rancher, Don Coleman, were killed. Coleman had just closed a cattle deal. Browder had seized his pack of currency, amounting to ten thousand dollars.

The outraged residents of Red Rock demanded the immediate capture of the Browder band. For a long time Sheriff Morgan and Deputy Kent had quelled trouble in that rough country with generous sprinklings of lead but, lately, growls had been heard.

Forming a resolute posse of two, Sheriff Morgan and Kent had taken up the trail. Near Storm Mountain, Morgan became convinced that the outlaws were heading for the cabin. It was possible that the place had been used as their headquarters.

The cedars thinned about the running sheriff. Morgan broke out into the open. His gaze rested on the gloomy outlines of a large cabin. Light glowed in the window at one side. The place was without other sign of life.

The cabin was built on a flat near a small bluff, many yards of smooth grassland between its front and the curving forest. Morgan faced a maze of twisted rocks and ledges. Great stones were piled about in fantastic forms as though from some ancient upheaval. The place was known as the "Devil's Garden."

Tearing along over the stony space, Sheriff Morgan hastened to the cabin. He approached cautiously and came up under the large closed window. His heart pounding fiercely, the man peered within.

Lee Kent was not to be seen. Cursing inwardly, Morgan studied four men in the candlelight. He recognized Browder—cruel, slanting eyes marring his face. The chief's partner, Gulch Kabler, and Weldon and Cass also were there. The four were standing—and talking in excitement. Morgan could not hear their words. One of the band was missing—a man called "Mex."

Deep, terrible anger welled up in Morgan. The absence of Kent indicated strongly that he had been killed. The sheriff's hands dropped over the butts of his two guns. He crept around toward the door.

Morgan was six feet two, and heavily bodied. His strong face was of grim formation—sturdy chin and jaw, massive forehead, and piercing black eyes. Although he shaved daily, the shadow of dark whiskers was always present. The officer's uncanny power with his two six-guns had been tested frequently.

Morgan's unrelenting eyes rested on the heavy chain hanging at the door. It was equipped with a padlock for outside locking—to keep out wild animals. The cabin had been built by the town sportsman years ago. It was used occasionally as a hunters' lodge.

Sheriff Morgan gripped his guns in readiness. He kicked out with his right foot. The great force tore open the door, which slammed backward.

As Sheriff Morgan stepped inside, four renegades grabbed for their belt guns. But their hands halted at the butts. The two leveled guns were ominous, compelling.

"Lay off, hombres!" Morgan roared. "Don't budge—or I'm shore shootin'! Up with them hands!"

Browder and his three men hesitated, speechless in surprise. They read the angry face of the sheriff. Their hands drifted slowly upward.

His fingers resting on triggers, Morgan kicked the door shut without turning. He stepped to one side. If the door were opened he would not be seen at once.

"Browder," Morgan began, every muscle on the alert, "I'm arrestin' yuh—all of yuh—fer them killin's! Yuh kin turn over th' ten thousand right now!"

The men stood near the back wall. They glowered. No reply was offered as they returned the sheriff's steel glance.

The interior of the log cabin had impressed itself on Morgan's mind. There were half a dozen bunks, a table on which burned a candle stuck in a bottle, and a cold fireplace. Directly above the men was the square opening that led into the loft. The place could accommodate a party of hunters.

Bad-eyed Browder had gained his name because of his hideous eyes. With brows and yellowish-brown eyes slanting sharply, a sinister appearance was lent his face. It had been said that the viciousness of the Orient was behind those eyes. He was a large man.

Browder's three men were garbed in rough clothes, and unshaven. They were typical thugs of the cattle country. Kabler and Weldon were powerful men. But Cass was small and slight of figure. The little outlaw's receding chin was thatched with colorless whiskers. His

eyes were watery—pleading now under the officer's black muzzles.

"Browder!" Morgan broke out harshly. "I'm takin' you hombres in to jail to-night. Yore days o' killin' an' rustlin' are over! Fust, though, *explain what yuh've done to Deputy Kent!*"

Driving force was behind the sheriff's order. Browder moistened his misshapen lips. This act was followed by a defiant grin.

"Tell yuh what we've done to Kent?" queried Browder slowly. "What th' hell makes yuh think anyone's poked in outside o' yerself, Sheriff?"

Morgan decided to take more stringent steps. . . . A slight movement attracted his eye. His gaze was drawn to the ceiling, at the near edge of the loft opening. A six-gun was gaping toward him!

His spine stiffening, Morgan saw the gun lowered. A forearm, then the black hair and eyes of a man were seen. Morgan roused himself in a flash of action.

The gun in the sheriff's right hand tilted. Blazing powder and lead spewed upward at a sharp angle. Simultaneously the weapon above exploded. But Morgan's bullet had raked across the exposed forearm. The aim of the fifth outlaw, Mex, was deflected. The bullet from above was buried in the wood floor. The six-gun clattered down.

Bitter oaths sounded from the loft. Mex had disappeared. The other men attemped no false move. Morgan's eyes had reverted instantly to them. The gun in his left hand had not been shifted.

Browder was seized with fury.

"Damn yuh, Mex!" he bellowed. "Yuh shoulda plugged him. Wait till I get my paws on yore greasy hide!"

"Shut up, Browder!" directed Morgan. "Yuh're givin' me fidgety fingers! Now tell yore playful greaser to come climbin' down that ladder!"

"Th' hell yuh say!" cried Browder in return. "Stay where yuh are, Mex! He can't make yuh move. The loft floor's too thick to shoot through. Morgan, I hate to call yore hand—but yuh ain't arrestin' any o' us! Yuh're not takin' th' money in—or us either! Ha! Ha! In a minute now yuh'll be *passin' over yore six-guns!*"

Morgan leaned forward, half crouching. The muscles of his face stood out.

"This ain't no time for talk, Browder!" he fired back. "Mex comes down or I start shootin'!"

Browder grinned carelessly.

"It shore hurts me to tell yuh, Morgan," he asserted. "Yuh've separated Mex from his gun—but he still carries a knife! Mex has a passion fer deputies!"

Morgan stared fixedly at the killer.

"Yuh mean—"

"Plumb right!" Browder interrupted. "Kent's up there in ropes. He's well—but th' kid won't live long unless yuh turn over them guns!"

Morgan could feel a terrible weight pressing down upon him. If what the leader said was true—

"That's a trick o' yores, yuh sneakin' wolf!" Morgan told the other. "Reckon yuh think I'll fall fer that—"

"Mex, have yuh got that knife?" Browder yelled.

"I got it, boss!" came Mex's triumphant voice.

"Cut off Kent's gag—an' let him talk fer hisself!"

A man was heard to clear his throat.

"They've got me, Clint, awright!" Lee Kent called down. "I threw some lead, but the greaser jumped me from behind. Keep th' drop on 'em, Clint, ol' boy! We gotta take 'em back to Red Rock!"

Morgan was relieved. Yet his fears were realized. Kent probably had just been shoved into the loft.

"Don't worry, Lee!" Morgan replied. "I'm mighty glad yuh wasn't plugged!"

"Now, Sheriff," Browder spoke up, "let's git to terms. I've been heerin' 'bout yuh two hell-throwin' battlers. Heerd how yuh took Kent a wanderin' waddy—an' made him a fast-gunnin' manhound! You two are purty close, I figger. Do yuh want th' kid's throat slashed? Or will yuh give up them Colts?"

Browder cast his fiendish gaze upon the officer.

"Hombre, there ain't enough o' yuh to kill Kent!" Morgan declared. His voice was strangely quiet.

"Don't be so almighty sure, Morgan," returned the bandit chief. "All I gotta do is give Mex th' word. His knife's plenty sharp too. Think fast! I'm gittin' tired holdin' my hands up!"

The three other outlaws below peered anxiously at the sheriff.

"I've still got yuh covered," reminded Morgan. "I might pick yuh off before yuh could draw!"

"Kent would be killed—an' th' same fer you!" Browder assured. "Listen, Morgan, I'm admittin' yuh could plug a couple of us. Here's a proposition—if you an' Kent wanta live. Hand over yore hoglegs peaceable. We'll tie yuh up there with Kent. All of us figger on stayin' here t'-night. In th' mornin' we're gonna clear outa yore territory. Afore we go I'll see that yore ropes are kinda loose. Yuh'll be able to work free in a few hours. No man kin say that Browder goes back on his word!"

Morgan's guns were leveled steadily. Only one choice lay before him. He would not let harm come to his friend Kent—though the murderers escaped and he lost his office. If he complied with the outlaw's wishes, the chances were that Browder and his men never would be seen in that section again—might never be captured.

"I ain't stuck on holdin' up th' air!" Browder grated angrily. "Talk up, Morgan, or I'll promise nothin'. I'm countin' five. At the end, Mex kin stick Kent. If yuh start shootin' while I'm countin', Mex will git yore pardner! D'yuh hear, Mex!"

"Bueno! I gotcha, boss!" Mex replied.

"One!" Browder started.

The speaker and his three fellows tensed their bodies. Morgan noted that their arms eased downward slightly.

"Two!"

"Three!"

The merciless eyes of Browder gleamed with yellowish light.

"Four!"

A storm of emotion swayed Morgan. Browder opened his mouth for the count of five.

"Wait!" Morgan burst out sharply. "Yuh kin have it yore way—fer th' present, Browder. I'm tellin' yuh there ain't one o' yuh man enough to harm Kent—square! Yuh won't be roamin' free long!"

With this promise Sheriff Morgan stepped up to the table. He laid his guns there. When he looked up, he found himself staring into four six-guns.

Morgan laughed shortly.

"What next, Bad-eye?" he wanted to know. "Better make use o' yore power—while yuh got it!"

Browder was obviously pleased with his own ingenuity. Kabler and Weldon looked upon him admiringly. Cass chuckled almost deliriously, a huge forty-five thrust out in his hand.

"Sheriff, yuh're nervy—but a big fool!" Browder decided. "Yuh could git a good depity ag'in. Yuh won't git us—an' yuh've shook yore job! Fer a friend! Ha! Ha!"

Morgan knew that a gunman like Browder could not understand the motives that prompted his surrender.

"Did you two come yere alone?" Browder demanded suddenly.

"I'll let you worry about that!" Morgan retorted.

"Wal, I reckon I won't. If there'd 'a' been anyone along, they'd blundered in by now. Sheriff, kindly step up into the receivin' room. Mex must be kinda anxious to see yuh hogtied!"

His keen glance surveying the armed four, Morgan turned away. He walked to the back wall. A ladder was nailed against the logs.

Morgan grabbed hold of the wood rungs and started climbing. He glanced up at the square opening. It was large enough for two men to pass through at the same time.

Morgan climbed slowly. Weldon followed directly below him. Kabler was ready to bring up the rear. Browder and Cass stood looking up, guns in their hands.

The officer of Red Rock was at the top of the ladder. His head and shoulders disappeared. A light had flared up in the loft. Morgan glanced about quickly.

Bound hand and foot, Kent was stretched out in a pile of dry grass. The Mexican had lighted a candle set on a wood block.

The outlaw turned, a knife in his hand.

As the Mexican faced about, Morgan acted. He was half way through the opening. His hand on the edge of the loft floor, Morgan suddenly kicked downward with all his force. His right foot struck Weldon full on the head. The man let out a roar of pain. He lost his grip on the ladder. Weldon sprawled downward, carrying Kabler with him.

Clint Morgan levered himself into the protecting loft. He landed on his chest, but jerked himself up and aside. Mex had gleaned what Morgan had done below. His right hand swept back. The knife whistled through space. The blade missed the officer's side-flung body by an inch. The knife was imbedded in a log, the handle quivering.

Morgan bounded forward upon the frustrated Mexican. The man had stepped near. Morgan met him with a crashing fist over an eye. Mex was lifted off his feet. The rustler struck the candle block as he rocked backward, falling amid the bedding. The candle fell with him, the flame igniting the withered grass.

But Morgan did not have time to note this. He leaped to the log wall and found the Mexican's knife. The sheriff rushed to the side of his deputy. Morgan smiled encouragingly. No time was found to pass a word. With two swift strokes, Morgan cut the ropes at Kent's hands and feet. The second officer was aided up by powerful arms.

They had no more than gained their feet when the loft hole was choked with killers. Kabler stepped upon the floor, with Weldon close behind. Guns were in their hands.

Morgan and Kent rushed to meet the new danger. The sheriff grappled with Kabler. He held the other's gun hand. Morgan attempted to stab with the knife. They wrestled about, both unable to use their weapons.

Kent, a powerful man, landed upon Weldon. The deputy clung to the man's arms. The four scrambled about.

Meanwhile, the pile of grass at the front of the loft was afire. Clouds of pungent smoke rolled toward the roof. A tongue of flame shot out and licked the Mexican's arm. The outlaw, dazed by Morgan's first blow, dodged aside. He struggled to his feet and swayed uncertainly in the heavy smoke. Coughing, he threw himself among the fighting men.

The loft was fairly large. The roof was peaked at the middle, sloping down toward the sides. The men could stand at full height in the center space. The only opening was that which led down to the main room.

Conscious of the fire at the front, Morgan fought with Kabler. Browder's partner was a hardened man. His methods of fighting were vicious. Morgan's hand, bearing the knife, was flung back against the logs. Kabler reached out with his gun, striking the sheriff's hand. The keen-bladed knife dropped. But Morgan fell upon the outlaw. He wrenched at the gun, which curved down through the hole. Morgan struck Kabler with a stinging left over the heart. The killer plunked against the wall, then sank to the floor.

A man landed upon Morgan's shoulders. He reached around to grasp the Mexican. The sheriff tore himself free. Mex was bent on having revenge. His long black hair was matted over his perspiring face. The heat was becoming great. The whirling feet of the fighting men above the hole prevented Browder and Cass from joining the mêlée.

Morgan, too close to strike, grabbed Mex's body to him in a squeezing hold. He endeavored to choke the breath from the swarthy man. Mex grunted in dismay. He gulped down the smoky air.

Weldon still clenched his gun. He could not use it. Kent was fighting grimly. Weldon rapped him smartly on the head with the gun barrel. The deputy swept blindly aside. The desperado whipped the gun up to fire upon him.

Morgan saw the move. Holding Mex by the shoulders, he lifted the criminal and swung his legs. Mex's shins slapped with terrible force against Weldon's middle. The six-gun roared. The bullet

sailed through the roof. Kent, recovering from the blow, again met Weldon as the latter came up with driving fists.

By this time a rushing sound of leaping flames filled the chamber. Acrid smoke hung like a pall over the fighting men. Officers and outlaws coughed and sputtered. The heat was intense. The yellow blaze lighted the interior garishly. The desperation of the men made it possible for them to endure the torture.

The flames ate hungrily into the roof. The entire fore part of the loft was now a broiling mass. Some of the smoke that swept back was sucked down through the hole. Browder and Cass yelled loudly to their comrades.

Beads of sweat stood out on Morgan's face. He was blinded by the swirling clouds. The flames were creeping near. Kabler got up and intervened. A blow from Weldon knocked Morgan several feet. Fire swept across the sheriff's back, searing his body.

With an oath the sheriff plunged forward among the men. The pain changed him into a being of flashing fists and legs. Morgan's right arm snapped out. His fist hooked Kabler on the chin. The outlaw shot back. Kabler landed over the loft hole. He fell heavily upon Browder. The two shot down the ladder, carrying the cursing Cass with them.

Weldon and Mex, the rustlers remaining in the fire-gutted attic, sought frantically to quit the hellish room. No less eager to follow suit were Morgan and Kent. Death by fire was close before them.

Mex broke away from Kent, throwing himself into the hole. The deputy bounced behind him down the ladder. They measured their lengths on the floor. Then they came up, entangled with Browder, Kabler and Cass.

Despite the terrific heat, Morgan was fighting savagely. Weldon did his best to down him. The two were nearly strangled by the bitter smoke. Their garments were wet with perspiration.

Morgan and Weldon, locked in each other's arms, rocked away from the fire. The men were hardly aware of it when they shot through the opening. The two landed upon the heads of the others. Most of the fighters went down, tearing upward the next instant.

The temperature below was not so high. Relief imparted new strength to those who had been in the fiery loft. The seven milled together in a flurry of deadly action. The six-guns were knocked from the hands of Browder and Cass. Cass, the treacherous little outlaw, fought to drag himself away from the others; but smashing hands kept him in the bitter fight.

Scant moments had passed since Morgan had kicked down while on the ladder. But the minutes had been as hours to him. Browders' gang of powerful cutthroats had a wide reputation for viciousness. It would require more than desperate effort to take the five assassins.

The candle still burned on the table. But its light was paled by the red fury that spread over the square hole in the ceiling. The fire, at the front of the cabin, was spreading from the loft. Creeping tongues heated the log walls and then clung hungrily. A roaring sound beat down. The upper part, roof, walls and loft, were a solid mass of flames.

Having escaped the fire for the time, the seven fought below. Morgan and Kent found themselves backed against logs. Occasionally burning pieces of wood shot down through the hole, to be smothered under their feet.

The two law guardians faced a half circle of desperadoes. Ugly curses rolled from the outlaws. Bad-eyed Browder thundered orders to his men—orders that were barely heard by his infuriated pack.

Morgan did not wait for the ruffians to close in. Followed by Kent, he threw himself among them. The sheriff aimed a right at Browder's head. He struck the man's temple. The force of the blow tore away inches of skin. The chieftain heaved away. He fell across the table. The bottle holding the candle smashed on the floor. The tiny flame died. Browder lay face up on the heavy table, for the moment uninterested in the fight.

But Morgan did not stop with him.

Weldon was probably the heaviest man of the bunch. The killer sprang for the sheriff, his bulging arms pumping. Morgan evaded that frenzied rush, stepping to one side. Cass was trying to strike him from behind. But the struggling Kent and Kabler bumped him away.

As Weldon thundered against the wall, knocking the skin from his knuckles, Morgan wheeled. When Weldon fronted him again, the officer plunged. If Morgan could work magic with his brace of forty-fives, he was equally adept with his fists. His left caught Weldon near the middle. The rustler cried out in pain. Morgan's right described a swift arch, ending against the other's neck. Weldon's head flopped to one side. The man spat blood as he was hurled back against the wall. The cutthroat leaned there like a statue, his senses reeling.

Head thrust out, Morgan rushed to one side. The Mexican hurtled forward, missing the officer. Morgan's fists played a one-two on Mex's body as he passed. The blows were charged with knockout force. Mex struggled to keep his footing but Morgan tore into him again.

Bad-eyed Browder slid off the table and charged like a bull. The leader struck from behind. The blow caught Morgan on the shoulder. The officer forgot Mex. The painful stroke swung him completely around.

Browder was seething with rage. His angled eyes flared with sickly yellow color. Incoherent oaths and mutterings issued from his curling lips.

Smoke clouds choked the men—made their faces indistinct.

Morgan ducked low when Browder advanced again. The killer's arm streaked over his head. In a bent position, Morgan drummed his rocklike fists upon his opponent's chest. Browder gasped in sudden misery. Then he pulled himself aside, striking out to stem the sheriff's mighty attack.

Cass had turned his wavering attention to Kent. The deputy had his hands full with the broad-shouldered Kabler. This badman was second only to Browder in might and cruelty.

Kent exchanged rapid-fire blows with his adversary. He and Kabler were well matched. Kent warily circled Browder's favorite. Kabler kept a close guard. His storming fists left bloody marks on the deputy's face. But Kent balanced the deal with ripping blows.

To counteract the approach of Cass, Kent backed near the wall. In this position he divided his attention between the two. Kent glanced quickly toward Morgan, who was mortally engaged with Browder.

"Smash th' devil's head, Clint!" Kent cried as he fought. "Yuh shore have got 'em goin'! I'll hold Kabler an' th' little frog!"

Cass sputtered at the insult.

"Frog? Frog?" he screamed in high dudgeon. "I'll show yuh, damn yore stinkin' tongue! Wait'll I git my nails in yore eyes!"

As if to fulfill his dire threat, Cass launched himself between Kent and Kabler. Cass was amazed at his own temerity. The arms of the small man leaped up. He grabbed at Kent's neck. His hands catching in the deputy's shirt, he pulled away the front of that garment. Kent's left fist plopped over the outlaw's nose. Tasting his own blood, Cass shot down and slid several feet across the floor.

Mex's interest in the fight returned. He stole around Morgan and Browder, looking for a chance to strike. Weldon, at the wall, felt his strength return. He worked his arms and legs, finding them unbroken. Then he imitated Mex's tactics, for the sheriff and Kent were showering steam-hammer blows in wild haste.

Morgan's glance rested on the ceiling. The slabs of wood were outlined in glowing red. The penetrating fire found its way through the loft floor. Puffs of smoke shot between the ceiling strips, backed by fire.

The ceiling was several feet above their heads. Yet gusts of heat brought fresh perspiration upon their torn bodies. The leaping monster above, forming a blazing furnace, sang in Morgan's ears. It would not be long before the roof and

loft floor, weakened by the flickering heat blades, would crash in and kill them.

As the fire increased, sliding farther down the sides of the cabin, the light brightened. Under the glowing, smoking canopy, the men waged a terrible fight. Five to two—Morgan and his deputy were outnumbered. But there could be no surrender.

Hammered by many fists, Morgan forgot everything but his purpose to strike and conquer. To him the lone cabin on Storm Mountain had become a den of fire and travail—a hell cabin.

Moisture oozed copiously from the men. The temperature in the large room heightened steadily. The outlaws glanced fearfully up at the burning ceiling.

Clint Morgan landed showering blows upon Browder. The killer staggered under their weight. But he was a hard man to down. Weldon and Mex added their blows to those of Browder. The attack of the three was wearing upon the sheriff.

The four were milling near Kent and Kabler. Cass still reposed on the floor. Six-guns, belonging to the outlaws and officers, were strewn about the cabin floor.

Weldon put in a swinging jab that swayed Morgan. The sheriff tripped over one of Browder's legs, slanting to the floor. As Morgan struggled to rise, his fingers closed over a gun.

The officer reared up. Browder and the other two outlaws closed in upon him. Morgan did not know which man was doomed to die. He jammed the gun barrel deep into the side of an outlaw. Twice he pulled the trigger. Powder flame spurted near Morgan's face. One of the men caved to the floor—dead.

Morgan swung the gun up again. Strong fingers closed over the muzzle, tore the weapon away. The smoking six-gun was flung aside by Browder. The sheriff fell upon him. A glance downward as he fought told Morgan that he had killed Mex.

The scrimmage above and below had taken place at a furious rate of speed. Veils of wafting smoke made the fight more uncertain. It was sometimes difficult for the men to see each other. By this time a large hole had been burned in the roof. The atmosphere cleared to some extent.

With the crackling fire raging above, the fight became a milling affair. The five men remaining on their feet were almost crazed with heat. Livid streamers were crawling down the four cabin walls. Burning embers shot from the blaze to fall among the men.

Returning to consciousness, Cass gazed wildly upon the lurid scene. Five men battling blindly under a fiery ceiling—the Mexican in a pool of blood on the floor.

Cass gulped. He wiped his bleeding nose with his shirt sleeve. Hurriedly he grabbed up a gun from the floor and holstered it. Cass wobbled to the door. He opened it and disappeared outside. The door swung open, the draft carrying away billows of smoke.

A series of sharp cracks came from the roof. Morgan saw Weldon gasp fearfully and glance upward. His move gave the sheriff a chance to land a telling blow. Morgan smacked over an eye. Weldon caved to the floor.

Browder rushed upon Morgan. The hunted man beat the officer's side. Morgan, reeling drunkenly, kept his arms jabbing fiercely. He smashed Browder's lips with a left swing.

Weldon climbed to a standing position, trembling in pain. He leaned against the wall, his head touching a holstered gun and belt hanging there. His eyes bloodshot from the smoke, Weldon reached for the weapon. He buckled on the belt. Almost blind, the man lurched across the room and out of the open door.

Deputy Kent was putting up a hard fight. Both were weakened by the onslaught of heat and fumes. Their blows lost force. But Kabler succeeded in planting a hard right behind Kent's ear. Morgan's helper plunged down as though he had been shot, and lay motionless.

Gulch Kabler, blood and water trickling down his face and chest, was on the verge of collapse. His head jerked up suddenly.

"Squelch that fool, Browder!" Kabler bellowed in frenzy. "Th' roof's comin'

down! I'm gittin' out—while I kin! *Come on!"*

But the wheeling pair did not heed him. Kabler gathered a brace of belt guns from a bunk. With the belts hanging on an arm, he forced himself to the door, and sought the cool air outside.

The fire had become almost unbearable to Morgan. He lurched to and fro with Browder. Neither one was able to strike effectively. Morgan's gaze swept from the fiery inferno above, to the unconscious Kent on the floor.

Driven to desperation, Morgan sought a chance to strike. He called upon reserve strength. Then his opportunity came. Bad-eyed Browder was crouched near the center of the room. The leader looked toward the door. His mouth opened. But what he proposed to say was never uttered.

Morgan's right fist caught him squarely on the chin. The blow was not of decisive caliber. It served to send Browder hurtling away. Morgan nearly fell from the effort. Browder jarred against the door jamb, rolled outside. Kabler rushed up and quickly drew the door shut.

Clint Morgan stormed over to the door, which was slammed in his face. He jerked at the wood handle. The barrier gave an inch or two—but held! The heat-seared sheriff became conscious that the outlaws had applied the chain and lock outside. *He and Kent were locked in the cabin furnace!*

"Great God!" Morgan burst out. "Th' fiends are plumb mad! Damn yuh, Browder!" he thundered in fury, "yore neck will stretch fer this—blast yore rotten souls!"

The sheriff's first concern was for his fallen deputy. He had noted a bucket of water on a bench in one corner. Morgan carried the bucket over to the prostrate Kent. The water was warm. He splashed it over the deputy's face.

"What th' hell?" the deputy gasped. "I'll git yuh, Kabler—yuh ugly slouch! What— Clint—fer God's sake! Th' place is burnin' down over us!"

Morgan offered cool words as the younger man gulped deeply from the bucket. Then Morgan took a long drink.

A glance revealed the alarming condition of the cabin. The noise of the fire and the terrible heat smote upon their senses. There was not a second to lose.

The men tried the door. Their combined strength had no effect upon it. The only other possible means of escape was by way of the two windows—one at each end.

Morgan searched on the floor. He took up two six-guns for himself, finding Kent a third. Their cartridge belts had not been removed.

Armed, Morgan ran to the east window. His appearance there was greeted by a stream of lead that shattered glass. The sheriff fell back. Kent let out a cry of dismay.

Morgan crossed the room with Kent. They crouched near the window facing the Devil's Garden. If they could reach the rocks, some protection might be found.

Uncertainty as to whether that end was guarded was dispelled when Morgan showed himself for an instant. Two shots were heard. Glass showered from the window.

"Lee, pard, th' devils are watchin' both windows!" Sheriff Morgan said. "They probably split—two men at each side. Shore must aim to make this our funeral pyre!"

The officers peered into each other's eyes. Morgan turned hastily to the window. The sort of death that seemed in store for them, he could wish for no man.

A rending crash at the front made the two face about. Moaning clouds of flame and smoke belched from a sagging section of the loft floor.

Attuned to the desperate need for action, Morgan rushed to a chair. He holstered his guns and picked up the wood. Back near Kent, the sheriff stepped out suddenly, and hurled the chair through the window. Framework and glass were stripped from the space.

The larger man hastened to the still body of the Mexican. A swift examination proved that Mex was beyond all earthly turmoil. Morgan lifted the body in his arms.

"Let's raise hell while they're reloadin'!" Morgan said.

The sheriff stooped under the window sill. He pushed the body upward, allowing Mex's head and shoulders to slide out the window. From a distance it would seem that one of the officers was trying to crawl out.

A series of booming shots came from a higher stretch of rocks. Morgan, holding on to the dead man's legs, felt lead thud into the body. It was the only means available to draw their fire. The officers, glancing out, judged that two men were slinging lead.

When the barrage ceased abruptly, Morgan and Kent leaned in the window over the body. Their three guns spat lead toward the point where they had seen darting streaks. A gurgling cry announced a hit.

"Got one!" Kent cried.

Morgan glanced up at the blazing cabin. Dense smoke was filling the room. A cloud poured through the open window.

"Git out—now!" Morgan urged Kent sharply.

Lee Kent lifted himself quickly through the window, his act screened by smoke. Morgan was hard behind. The sheriff landed on his feet beside his deputy. A hail of lead poured from the ledge. Smoke was thick around the cabin.

Morgan and Kent dashed toward the fringe of rocks a dozen yards away. They bent low, reloading as they ran. Bullets spattered all around them. The rocks were a few feet away . . . then they were among the rocks. The two fell low behind the first huge stones.

Morgan looked back. Great sheets of flame were shooting high above the cabin. The roof was engulfed in fire, which reached down the outside walls. They had escaped from the inferno none too soon.

The firing from the ledge was not so rapid as it had been. Morgan and Kent raised themselves. The moonlight was fairly strong. The two took great care in crawling to the next stone—toward the large barricade in the Devil's Garden.

Rocks of all sizes and shapes were massed in twisted and gnarled disorder. The stones choked the space between the cabin's rear wall and the sheltering bluff.

The bleeding sheriff and his deputy quickly worked their way forward. The stones, some of which were ten feet high, protected their grim advance. The officers were ready to kill on instant provocation.

When they were thirty feet from the rock ledge Morgan paused.

"Stay here, Lee! Keep 'em shootin'," Morgan instructed. "I'm hornin' in from behind! Run up when them guns stop barkin'!"

Morgan scurried among the rocks, familiar with the ground. In a few minutes he had reached a point behind the elevated mass. Guns in his hands, Morgan crept forward. Cautiously he slipped through a narrow opening that led into a trench behind the ledge. . . .

In the light of the moon and fire, Morgan looked upon a weird scene. Cass, the small outlaw, was crouching behind a flat-topped stone, blazing away toward the spot where Kent was stationed. He was using two guns. On a shelf of rock behind Cass, sprawled the limp body of Weldon. Morgan surmised that one of their bullets had killed the big murderer.

Cass was absorbed in the battle. Morgan stepped along, holstering his guns. Blood still was dripping from the sniper's nose down his bleached whiskers. The little man's appearance caused Morgan to grin.

Directly behind the killer, Morgan suddenly reached down and grabbed his forearms. He pulled Cass around. Twisting his hands, the sheriff snatched the guns away. Cass found himself searching the barrels of his own weapons.

"Don't shoot! Don't shoot, Sheriff!" Cass begged. The fugitive sagged to his knees in his fright. Cass continued to plead for his life.

"Shut up, yuh measly runt!" grated Morgan. "I'll plug yuh if yuh keep on howlin'!"

Kent appeared breathlessly in the narrow entrance. His gun wavered on Browder's little killer.

Morgan jammed the outlaw's guns into his belt and drew his own, which were fully loaded. These he pressed against the small man's ribs. "Tell th' others we come out and yuh cornered us. Tell 'em to come an' help yuh," ordered Morgan. He gave the rustler instructions. Cass looked wildly up at his captor.

"Do as I say or I'll kill yuh on the spot!" Morgan cried, his deadly intent apparent to Cass. The man faced the burning cabin.

"Browder—Kabler!" Cass roared with surprising depth of voice. "Th' sheriffs are outa th' cabin. Got 'em cornered in th' rocks. They plugged Weldon. Come a-gunnin, hell-bent! *Help!*"

Any response that might have been voiced was drowned in a thundering crash. The three men behind the ledge saw the cabin roof sink inward. A spectacular shower of sparks rose high into the air. The fire died for a brief space, then blazed up higher than before. Only the lifeless body of Mex would be cremated. Flames now enveloped the entire cabin. . . .

Bad-eyed Browder and Gulch Kabler, rushing up from the forest, hastily entered the passage behind the ledge. Cass, under pressure, had called to guide them.

The two outlaws, a gun in each man's right hand, stormed into the trench. Cass cowered alone on the shelf near the dead Weldon. No one else was seen.

"Where th' hell are yer cornered men?" harshly demanded Browder. "Speak, boob, afore I break yore neck!"

Browder strode up. He shook Cass in a savage clutch. Kabler stood behind. A strange light was in the eyes of Cass. He appeared speechless with fright. Browder urged the gulping man to talk. Cass's cringing glare directed the gaze of Browder and Kabler to the shadows behind. Three six-guns in the gleaming, flickering light were leveled at the outlaws' hearts!

"Drop them irons!" commanded Morgan, steel in his voice. "Drop!"

The weapon held by Kabler clanged upon the stones. Browder's sinister eyes were heavy with yellow light. He pressed trigger. . . .

One of Morgan's guns boomed an instant in advance. The sheriff's bullet pierced the renegade's gun arm. Browder's lead was flattened on the rocks. His weapon dropped. He held his wounded arm, his features contorted with pain.

Morgan and the deputy stepped from the shadows. Their guns covered the three killers who remained alive. The arms of Kabler and Cass were in the air.

"For the second time, I'm askin' yuh fer Coleman's money, Bad-eyed!" Morgan said steadily. "Where is it? No tricks, now!"

Browder looked sullenly upon his angry captors. The fire-racked men would stand no trifling. The criminal dug into his pocket with his good hand. He pulled out a thick pack of bills, handing it over.

Clint Morgan holstered one gun. He took the money, glanced at it and shoved it into his pocket. His cold, accusing gaze rested upon the three killers.

"We're pullin' stakes for Red Rock—an' jail!" Morgan announced, his tone final. "Browder, yuh made a grand play to-night—that cost two lives—an a helluva good cabin! Capturin' th' pack o' yuh shore wouldn't 'a' been worth the life o' Deputy Kent. But I sorta had a hankerin' to hold a hangin' party with yuh in Red Rock . . . damn soon!"

SQUARE

By Earle Liederman

YES, it pays to be square—on the level,
To resist what temptations may send,
Though you may have to try like the devil,
It is worth it, old scout, in the end.

When your conscience is clear, you will know it,
And the whole world will bow at your feet,
You'll be fearless—your actions will show it,
You will win in the face of defeat.

You will bear all the blows without crying,
Though you bleed from your head to your feet,
You'll have grit that will seem terrifying
To the hearts that are filled with deceit.

And at night you will sleep—and keep sleeping,
In the day you will keep head erect,
For you're square and what's more to your keeping,
You're a man whom the world will respect.

THE NERVOUS WRECK

By R. L. Howard

Marshal Steppy Fancher slides with his fighting togs on square into the arms of a killer.

IT was snowing hard. An Arctic wind howled noisily about the sturdy log building. At frequent intervals, gusts of wind-driven snow sprayed hissing into the roaring fire. Behind the long bar, running the entire length of the big square room, Ben Madgett, recognized boss of Kolder's Camp, dispensed liquid refreshment, mostly in the form of hot toddies, to the thirsty miners. When not officiating behind the bar in Madgett's saloon and dance hall, Ben Madgett was self-appointed peace officer, funeral director, dog fancier, banker, and all-around substantial citizen—in fact, the backbone of the camp.

It was still early in the evening, and, although a considerable number of the camp's male citizenry had already assembled, the big log door still swung inward occasionally to admit a late comer. Muffled in furs as they were, all men looked alike before these furs were thrown aside. So it was that none of the occupants of the saloon paid any particular attention to the snow-covered figure of a big man, until that latter, after shaking himself free of the clinging snow as a huge bodied grizzly might free itself after a shower, produced two ugly looking automatics, and pronounced the command:

"Stick 'em up!"

The lone bandit's hairy face, glistening with wetness as the heat thawed the ice from his whiskers, glared savagely here and there.

"Jake Lenz!" a miner muttered, as he thrust both hands up over his head.

It did not need this muttered announcement to identify Jake Lenz, bandit and killer. All eyes flickered automatically toward Ben Madgett. Each one of these sidelong glances mutely bespoke Madgett's assistance. Most of the men carried well filled money belts. In all things Ben Madgett was their adviser; he was known as a terrible fighter, a man who feared no living thing. This reputation was no idle rumor; much solid fact was there to back it up. Ben Madgett's reputation alone had sufficed to thus far keep Jake Lenz away from Kolder's Camp. Now that the bandit had appeared, however, it was up to Ben Madgett to do something about it.

Although he *was* a brave man, Ben Madgett was no fool. He realized instantly that in this exigency there was nothing he could do. There was no weapon upon which he could readily lay his hands; few, if any, of the men in the room were armed. Small arms were useless things in this northland, and there was no reason why a man should bring his rifle into a friendly gathering such as this was. Lenz would not hesitate to shoot to kill. The bandit's well deserved reputation definitely promised this.

So it was that Ben Madgett obligingly raised his hands above his head along with the rest.

It was all over in a brace of minutes.

Clutching a moosehide poke well filled with gold dust, Jake Lenz backed away and out through the heavy door into the night.

After the bandit had gone, complete stillness settled over the little room, while the ancient old clock on the wall might have registered twenty seconds. Then Ben Madgett laughed. When Madgett laughed, displaying a row of big white teeth through a screen of yellow whiskers hiding his face, most men laughed with him. They laughed with him, now. Withal, there was something a bit forced in that laughter. Every man there, if he had given but a moment's thought to the matter would have realized that Madgett had been as helpless as they; still, Ben Madgett was such a confident, competent, individual that it hardly seemed possible to find him at a loss in any situation.

"Well, Jake sure put it across," the yellow-bearded man said. "Just like he always said he would. An' he sure knocked all my small talk into a cocked hat. Game rooster, Jake is—damned if he's not."

Ben Madgett had always maintained that Jake Lenz was a blustering fool. Stupid as a boiled owl, Madgett had often maintained. "Best thing he does is talk," he had said. "Of course he's got nerve; he can handle a gun right enough and he's killed so many men that a few more don't mean nothin' to him. Still and all he's a loud mouthed numbskull. And he won't never tackle Kolder's Camp. If he does, he won't get away with it."

Following the big man's reminder, all of the men recalled these oft repeated comments of Madgett's, having to do with the evil-faced bandit who had just relieved them of their hard earned dust.

"What—what you goin' to do about it, Ben?" one of the miners asked.

Ben Madgett was still grinning. The grin broadened out into a white-toothed smile. "I was just thinkin'," he mused, as though talking to himself. "Figure *I won't do nothin'* about it."

He cast an amused glance about the half circle of dark faces, and added, "What we got a law officer for?"

The men considered this statement in puzzled silence for a moment. True, the law in the shape of a marshal employed by the United States Government had recently come to Hager's Gulch a few miles away. But no resident of Kolder's Camp had before given a second thought to this circumstance. Possibility of Ben Madgett laying aside his responsibility as boss of Kolder's Camp in favor of this new arrival, who was probably a tenderfoot, totally unfamiliar with the north country, appeared to them too remote to merit serious consideration.

Great joker, Ben was. Most certainly he was joking now. So he was. But the joke Ben Madgett had in mind was in substance far removed from what any man there suspected. For Madgett had had a glimpse of Steppy Fancher, the new marshal, in Hager's Gulch. No other resident of Kolder's Camp had been thus favored.

Jealous of his prerogatives, as most self-appointed masters of men are apt to be, Ben Madgett had sensed a suggestion of dissatisfaction here and there with some of his recent rulings, this particularly in regard to his dispensation of justice in connection with various feuds which had resulted in several killings during the winter just past. Very well, right here was an excellent chance to enjoy a little joke, and, at the same time, set some of these doubters in their places.

Of course, after that queer little sketch of a man, Steppy Fancher, the United States Marshal, had failed in his attempt to get Lenz, he, Madgett, would go out and bring the bandit in. First, last and always, Ben Madgett was the loyal guardian of his flock—but first he would see that Kolder's Camp was provided with a laugh from the marshal's efforts; after that—well, the boys needed a lesson.

BUT when Steppy Fancher arrived at Kolder's Camp and Ben Madgett had a second look at him, his kindly heart refused to allow him to carry the joke through. The marshal was a little man, thin almost to the point of emaciation. It was a marvel to many how he had ever been able to hold to the icy, windswept

ridges on his way up from Hager's Gulch, without being blown away by the sixty-mile Arctic gale that had been raging for days. His face, the color of mahogany, was thin, and ribbed with leathery wrinkles. A pair of pale blue eyes peered out from beneath bushy, overhanging brows.

These eyes, forever flickering this way and that, were an index to the little marshal's most outstanding characteristic. He was as nervous as a setting hen! In this north country nervous men were scarce as hen's teeth, and, at first, the fidgety little marshal had appealed to Ben Madgett as a great joke. Sympathy, tempered by antipathy toward the United States Government, which had sent this pitiful specimen to this job — for which he evidently was altogether unfitted—reacted to change Madgett's first plan, which had been to turn Steppy Fancher loose, alone, upon the trail of Jake Lenz, the killer.

"I just can't do it," he told himself. "Poor little cuss. Even if he didn't get lost and kill hisself off, Jake would light on him. No, 'twouldn't be right to let him go it—alone. It would be just like I killed him with my own hands."

The substance of Madgett's intended joke having been noised about, considerable puzzlement was in evidence when it became apparent that Madgett was doing everything in his power to assist the little marshal, and intended joining forces with the marshal in the search for Jake Lenz. Upon being questioned Madgett made no secret of the reason for his change of heart. He had tried to persuade Fancher to go back to Hager's Gulch and let him, Madgett, bring Lenz in; but the little marshal would not hear of this.

"And so," Madgett explained to the interested ones who nightly gathered in his hostelry, "I'm goin' along anyhow. I'll come trailin' in packin' the little rooster on my back one of these days." He laughed, and the men laughed with him.

So it was that after devoting a day to most thorough and painstaking investigation into the personality and habits of Jake Lenz the killer, Steppy Fancher and Ben Madgett started out one gray morning at dawn behind Madgett's team of snow-white malamutes.

It was late spring, early summer, in the southland, and the blustering norther, vicious aftermath of winter, had departed as suddenly as it had come. The yellow sun was warm; rivulets of snow water tumbled down through rocky crevices in the hills. The going was heavy and progress slow. Once well into the hills Madgett took the business upon which he was engaged with the seriousness it deserved. Jake Lenz was a dangerous man, and an able one.

Assuming entire responsibility for the job in hand as it was his nature to do, Madgett approached the deserted diggings which had once been the prosperous mining camp inelegantly named Hell Hole; and the boss of Kolder's Camp now moved circumspectly. It was no secret that Jake Lenz had for years made his headquarters in some one of the many long deserted cabins in Hell Hole. Here he lived the year around, like a spider in its web, snapping up unsuspecting travelers, and, at intervals venturing forth upon that unpleasant business which had given him a livelihood for many years.

Only once had any real effort been made to capture the bandit and killer. In that attempt one man had been killed and three others more or less seriously injured. The attackers had finally left the field in possession of the bandit. Lightning fast with a gun, Jake Lenz was also possessed of courage uncommon in men of his ilk.

Ben Madgett did not consider it worth while to explain these things to Steppy Fancher. The task was his, Madgett's. It would be up to him, too, to see that his fidgety little companion didn't get into trouble. What the little cuss didn't know wouldn't hurt him. Knowing the sort of man they were after, it was entirely possible that the "nervous wreck," as Madgett had jokingly christened the little marshal, might go to pieces altogether. As it was, he seemed on the verge of complete collapse most of the time. At the slightest unusual sound he would jump as though he had been shot.

As they drew nearer the collection of weather-worn shacks that was Hell Hole, Ben Madgett found himself devoting the better part of his mental energy to ways and means of insuring Steppy Fancher's safety. The problem in regard to Jake Lenz was a more or less definite thing and presented a situation with which Ben Madgett was altogether familiar. He would scout around some, pick out the particular cabin in which the bandit was living; at an opportune time he would tackle the killer in his lair. With luck he might get the drop on his man. Chances were, however, there would be a fight.

All of which disturbed Ben Madgett not at all. He was entirely confident of his ability to bring Jake Lenz a prisoner back to Hager's Gulch. If only he had gone about the matter on his own hook as he should have done. Why had he gotten the law into the thing? But it was done now and there he was up in Jake Lenz's very back yard, his movements hampered by a peanut-sized, jumpy little cuss, who in a pinch could be counted upon to do more harm than good.

Steppy Fancher's evident nervousness began to tell on Madgett. In response to the slightest unusual sound the little man would spring into the air like a jack-in-the-box. Oftentimes he would cry out at things commonplace to Madgett but unusual to a tenderfoot such as Steppy Fancher undoubtedly was.

It was mid-morning of the third day when the two travelers came out upon a wooded ridgetop overlooking Hell Hole. The nights are never black in Alaska and they had been traveling steadily for eight hours. The dogs were exhausted; so also was Ben Madgett. Steppy Fancher, however, seemed as fresh and nervously alert as when they had started.

Ben Madgett motioned silently toward the clutter of unpainted shacks a mile distant on the opposite side of the valley. "Lenz hangs out there," he explained, briefly.

The little marshal nodded abstractedly. His restless eyes peered furtively here and there. "Don't you suppose he'll kind of be on the lookout for us—for you?" he finally suggested.

Ben Madgett laughed. "Hell, no," he said, "nobody can get near them cabins down there without his seein' 'em. And anyhow, Jake Lenz ain't afraid of nothin' —nobody."

Steppy Fancher essayed a white-lipped grin. "Mebbe so," he agreed doubtfully, "still an' all, I kind o' got a feelin' as how we've been follered, Ben."

Ben Madgett shrugged impatiently. "Nerves," he said, "you sure got 'em bad."

The little man's head shook violently in agreement. "I'm terrible nervous, sure enough," he agreed. "I know it bothers you and I'm plumb sorry about it. But —but—I can't help it, Ben."

Ben Madgett did not reply. His keen eyes had told him that no one of those cabins down there gave evidence of being occupied. He wondered vaguely if the bird had flown. After a bit he became aware that Steppy Fancher was talking again.

"—and anyhow," the little man was saying, "these tricky nerves of mine don't bother me much, and like I say, Ben, I got a awful strong hunch that someone's been watching us, right close, for the past three or four hours."

Ben Madgett sighed resignedly. "Well, we'll make camp here, anyhow," he said, "and while you're unloadin' the sled I'll take a look around."

The little man dubiously agreed. It was evident that he had some further suggestion to offer. It was evident too that he sensed his companion's impatience. Rather, apparently, than run the risk of further irritating the big man, Fancher decided to keep his opinions to himself. As the little law officer started unloading the sled, Ben Madgett picked up his rifle and started away.

"Be back soon," he called. And then —"don't leave camp whatever you do."

Steppy Fancher made no sign to indicate that he had heard this last. Ben Madgett waited until he saw that the little man had, as usual, tackled the unloading of the sled from the most difficult angle possible, then, muttering maledic-

tions upon his own foolishness which had gotten him into this mess, he strode away along the wooded ridgetop.

Although his movements were not consciously governed by anything Steppy Fancher had said, Madgett found himself circling the spot where they had decided to make camp. Despite the fact that he was unconsciously following Steppy Fancher's suggestion, the big man really did not expect to find anything.

So it was that, when he came upon fresh snowshoe tracks less than a quarter of a mile from camp, he was thoroughly surprised. Chance travelers were so uncommon as to be almost unheard of up in these hills; the only living human within a radius of many miles was Jake Lenz. Quick inspection assured Madgett that those snowshoe tracks had been made by a big man. All snowshoe tracks are different. Madgett had inspected the tracks left by Lenz in Kolder's Camp several days before. Now, he dropped on a knee with the idea in mind of definitely identifying, if possible, Jake Lenz, with the man who had made these particular tracks.

As he knelt there he realized vaguely that during the last hour or so it had become bitter cold. The sticky snow had frozen so hard that it now supported even his two hundred pound bulk. It was dark under the wide-limbed spruces. He bent low over the deeply indented tracks. There was a whisper of sound at his right, like the cautious tread of a man, slithering swiftly through the thin fluff of new snow covering the hard crust. Ben Madgett did not interpret the sound in this way, however. He was wise in the ways of the wilderness. More likely the sound had been caused by the reckless flight of a snowshoe rabbit, or the lumbering retreat of a porcupine.

He looked up, casually. A huge body loomed above him. He caught a brief glimpse of a rifle held club fashion, and of Jake Lenz's whiskered face. Then, the rifle descended.

Ben Madgett threw himself face downward on the ground. The rifle missed its objective by a matter of inches. As it was, however, the heavy gun barrel struck Madgett across the shoulders with crushing force. His face plowed into the hard crust. Partially stunned by the terrible blow, he pawed the snow and ice from his lacerated face and struggled up on hands and knees.

A crushing weight landed upon his back, rigid knees crushed him down and squeezed the breath from his body. A clubbed fist struck him beneath an ear. He fought frantically but to no avail. Again and again that hard fist hammered the side of his head, bored skillfully in under his unprotected jaw. The white snow went red before Ben Madgett's watering eyes. With a mighty effort he rolled over, bringing his opponent with him. But he was too far gone to take advantage of this. Once more Jake Lenz's clubbed fist found its mark. Ben Madgett's bulky body twitched spasmodically, then was still.

MADGETT struggled back to consciousness to find himself bound hand and foot, back against a tree. His first conscious impression was that it had indeed become very, very cold. Already, his hands and feet were numb. His head was burning hot and throbbed painfully with each measured pulse beat. The midday sun shone without warmth down into the little cup-shaped depression. A sturdy lean-to had been built against a rocky wall. Before this lean-to Jake Lenz squatted, busily engaged cleaning his rifle.

A single glance told Madgett that the outlaw had chosen this spot as temporary camp with an eye carefully calculated to concealment. Semi-open slopes—shimmering glissades of icy glare—stretched skyward on two sides. From near at hand, however, the little gully was completely hidden. A man might pass within a dozen yards of the place without suspecting the existence of the cup-shaped hole which had seemingly been gouged out of the mountainside by some Gargantuan sculptor. On the other hand, the broken country on three sides at least, was well within the bandit's range of vision.

After assuring himself that there was

no possibility of working free of his bonds, Ben Madgett spoke.

"Well, what's the game?" he asked.

Jake Lenz looked up briefly from his task. His ugly face grimaced a half smile. "The game's all over, Ben," he finally said, "that is, your part is all over."

Ben Madgett swallowed hard. "What —what do you mean?"

Jake Lenz shrugged. "Just what I said," he announced, still grinning. "You've had your fun. It's all over as far as you're concerned. I'll be going away from here soon."

For a long minute Ben Madgett considered this enigmatic explanation. He was once more unpleasantly convinced that it was becoming momentarily colder and colder. He noted also that many coils of rope circled his body, holding him loosely but firmly, upright against the sturdy tree. Was it possible that the outlaw was going to leave him there—to freeze? No sooner had this possibility occurred to him than he put it into words.

Still grinning, Jake Lenz nodded his head. "That's right, Ben," he said, "you guessed it. Of course, I might have put a bullet in your carcass, or slid a knife between your ribs. But I ain't no hand with a knife and I didn't want to shoot you. Because why, I didn't want to get the little marshal all excited.

"You know, Ben, it's one thing to bump off a hard-boiled egg like you and it's something else again to send a representative of the United States Government over the Big Divide. Even though the little coot ain't much to look at, he's workin' for Uncle Sam, and believe me, Ben, I ain't hankerin' to get Uncle Sam after me. And that's how come I'm kind of lettin' you off, easy-like. It's gettin' cold and within a couple of hours at the most you'll be sleepin' right peaceful. You won't never wake up. By the time the little marshal finds you and cuts you loose, you'll be a sure-enough human icicle."

Jake Lenz laughed at his own gruesome joke.

And then, his hoarse-voiced chuckling ceased abruptly, and, with his eyes fixed on an icy glissade leading up out of the gully on the left, Lanz snatched up his rifle and scurried about behind the little lean-to.

Ben Madgett's throbbing eyes followed the bandit's gaze. At what he saw he swore softly, hopelessly, through clenched teeth. Up there on the very top of that icy slide, his skinny body silhouetted clearly against the lemon-colored skyline, stood Steppy Fancher. The little man was evidently considering the feasibility of making his way down that icy chute. Even a child might have seen that this feat was impossible, Madgett told himself bitterly. The hill, swept free of the last snow by the winds, was literally glare ice. Still, Steppy Fancher seemed to be seriously considering—was actually coming down.

Even as the little man—his eyes on the half-hidden lean-to at the bottom of the hill, behind which Jake Lenz crouched—started tentatively downward, it occurred to Madgett that, with the foolish naiveness of a child, Steppy Francher was, after all, perhaps, choosing the safest and quickest —certainly the quickest—method of reaching his objective. On all other sides the slopes leading upward out of the little gully were sparsely wooded; but at no point were the isolated trees and upjutting stumps frequent enough to offer adequate concealment to a man seeking to make his way down into the gully. From the top of the slope in any direction the distance to the little lean-to, and Jake Lenz, was too far to allow for accurate shooting.

Perhaps the little marshal had figured all of this out. Not for an instant, however, did Ben Madgett credit the little man with the nervy common sense which such a situation called for. The marvel was that the little rooster had discovered the well hidden camp, at all.

Just as Madgett had expected, at the end of the first half a dozen tentative, downward steps, the little marshal's feet flew from under him and he started down the slippery side hill, rolling over and over, zigzagging this way and that and gathering momentum constantly, until, within a hundred yards he was traveling at express train speed.

Jake Lenz, rifle in hand, came out from behind the lean-to, and, grinning, watched the little man's flying progress.

The marshal was evidently making no attempt to stay his rapid flight. Unless some one of the widely scattered trees at the bottom of the slope came within the erratic channel of his flight, he would end up at the waiting bandit's very feet.

Fancher's hurtling body missed two thin-trunked saplings by inches. With a third, however, he was not so fortunate. He came toward this third tree head on, traveling at tremendous speed. He strove frantically to twist aside. Due to the speed at which he was moving, he was unable to do this. At the last moment he thrust out both hands for protection. If he had struck the tree, his head would have been crushed like an eggshell. As it was, the rifle, held rigidly in both hands, came in contact with the tree.

The gun snapped off short at the barrel; and, clutching the now useless gun, the barrel in one hand, butt in the other, the little man gyrated down the slope, which was absolutely open for the rest of the distance. His spinning body came to a slithering stop within a rod of the grinning bandit.

And then, Ben Madgett was treated to the surprise of his life. Steppy Fancher hopped to his feet like a cat. With a swiftness almost unbelievable he sprang forward, and before Jake Lenz could make a move, brought the rifle barrel, still held rigidly in his right hand, down upon the bandit's mittened hand. Jake Lenz dropped his rifle with a yell. For an instant he instinctively clutched at his hand, the bones of which had been broken by that smashing blow.

With numbed fingers Steppy Fancher fumbled inside his disordered mackinaw. His fingers came away empty. A wondering expression flashed across the little man's weather-browned face. "Lost it," he muttered.

Jake Lenz, his heavy face twisted with pain, reached for his rifle with his good hand. But his downstretched fingers never touched that black gun. As though actuated by a gigantic steel spring, Steppy Fancher sprang forward and dove headlong at the bandit's legs. The attack was timed to a nicety. Jake Lenz, overbalanced as he reached for his rifle, sprawled sidewise upon the ground. For an instant, a cloud of snow dust hid the struggling bodies. Then Steppy Fancher sprang to his feet. He reached for the bandit's rifle. Just as his fingers closed about the gun's black barrel, however, Jake Lenz kicked the gun out of reach. Once more they grappled.

Ben Madgett, breathing hard, watched with all eyes. He was too astounded to even consider his own discomforts. Was it possible that this steel-bodied, human fighting machine could be that same twitching, nerve-racked little man whose utter helplessness he had been reviling for the past week? It did not seem possible. Still . . .

Once more Steppy Fancher wriggled out of the tangle of struggling bodies. He bounced upright like a rubber ball. But he did not go for the rifle this time. Instead, he caught up the barrel of his own gun out of the trampled snow at his feet. Jake Lenz dove headlong for his rifle. He failed to reach it. Steppy Fancher leaped forward. The rifle barrel swished above his head. It came down solidly with a dull, hollow sound atop Jake Lenz's thick skull. With a gusty groan the bandit pitched forward upon the snow.

With quick, efficient movements, Steppy Fancher turned the bandit over, ripped the clothes from about his chest, knelt and placed an ear over the unconscious man's heart. "Didn't mean to hit him so hard," he muttered. "Thought maybe he was done for."

The little man's movements during the next several minutes followed this same efficient course. He freed Madgett, then, without a word, collected wood and built a roaring fire. Not until Madgett's chilled body had begun to respond to the warming effect of much hot tea, hastily brewed, did the little man so much as speak. "Guess maybe you better hole up here for a few days, Ben. I'll take this bird to town and send somebody up after

you. Your shoulder is all smashed to hell. Couple of ribs broke, too. Wouldn't do for you to travel."

Ben Madgett was still too astonished to protest. When finally released from his uncomfortable position he had been unable to walk for a moment. The little man had inspected his back where the bandit's clubbed rifle had struck him and had solemnly pronounced these rather serious injuries. Yesterday, he would have laughed at the man, but now, even though Steppy Fancher had again become his old nervous self, Ben Madgett found himself listening with close attention and respect.

"Aw, I ain't hurt that bad, am I, Marshal?"

"Absolute. And you hadn't oughter—"

"But I'll make it all right, Marshal. Couple of broken ribs don't mean nothing."

Steppy Fancher shrugged. "All right," he agreed, "just as you say. Guess I know the way back, so that if you flop, I—I—can get you in."

Ben Madgett smiled at this.

He did not smile, however, when, a few days later, after having plodded gamely on through the sticky snow until the stabbing pain in his back could be no longer endured, he dropped in his tracks. He realized, in a vague sort of way, that he was being lifted in the little marshal's thin, wiry arms. He knew, too, when he was placed on the sled beside Jake Lenz's handcuffed form. Then he fell into a fevered sleep.

It was evening of the twelfth day that Steppy Fancher, haggard-eyed, due to not having slept for sixty hours, snaked into Kolder's Camp behind Ben Madgett's team of footsore malemutes. Jake Lenz, a thoroughly chastened badman, if ever there was one,—due to having ridden uncomfortably bedded with a delirious sick man for three days and three nights, was unceremoniously bundled off to the jail at Hager's Gulch.

Ben Madgett, by this time crazy as a March hare, was gently released from the many coils of rope which had served to hold him upon the sled, and placed under the care of old Doc Spivvens, the local veterinary and medico.

Although so nervous he could not stand still, Steppy Fancher was apparently still going strong. He seemed to consider the Herculean task which he had accomplished as a matter calling for no particular comment. He seemed preoccupied, vaguely troubled. "Wouldn't have parted with that gun for a hundred dollars," he told the restful audience in Ben Madgett's place that night. "Lost it somewhere. Must have been when I took that slide. It was a Colt forty-five; don't see many of them up in this neck of the woods. I ain't been without it for thirty years. Like losin' an old friend," he explained apologetically. "Sure makes me feel awful bad."

THE WEST LOSES ANOTHER CHAMPION

HANS LANGSETH, 82, North Dakota farmer, known internationally for his 17-foot beard, died at his home recently from infirmities.

For years, after letting his beard go uncut from July 14, 1875, Langseth traveled around the world with a circus without meeting a match for his beard. In 1922 he won the world's "longest beard" championship at the "days of '49" celebration in Sacramento.

CLOCK HAS RUN NEARLY TWO CENTURIES

IN the Royal Observatory Museum in Greenwich, the marine chronometer, constructed in 1737, and which won the Government award of $100,000, is still running.

It is really a clock within a clock. There is a little clock which runs four minutes only, and another clock which automatically rewinds its small brother every four minutes, and itself has to be wound once daily. It has more than five hundred parts.

RESTLESS GUNS

A SIX-PART, QUICK-TRIGGER WESTERN NOVEL

By William Colt MacDonald

PART THREE

Read in the opening paragraphs the complete details of what has happened, and go on with the story.

HOT from an unsuccessful revolution in Mexico, into the wild cowtown of Cuarta City come Tuscon Smith and Stony Brooke, two rambling waddies with itching trigger-fingers.

After using their six-guns to good advantage in helping Terry Kellicut, owner of the Box TK Ranch, to clean the badmen out of the Warbonnet Saloon, they learn from him that one Hawk Blackwood is seeking to gain control of the community. Already he owns the Warbonnet and the local honkytonk, controls Judge Mandell and Marshal Laramie Lyons, has frightened the sheriff out of town, and has gained possession of the Bar X 8 Ranch. The latter he acquired, by dubious means, from old Stephen Stinson, owner of the Slash S. He also holds a mortgage against the Slash S, and it appears that Stinson will be unable to pay it when due.

Stinson has practically given up the fight and gotten rid of all the help save Sleepy Hatch, the cook; but his daughter Teddy is still carrying on. The two waddies decide to offer their services to the Slash S, and leave town with Kellicut for the ranch. Blackwood gives orders to Lyons to "get" the two, by the quickest means possible.

They arrive at the Slash S ranch house and, after some hesitation, Teddy Stinson accepts the offer of the two waddies, and Kellicut leaves.

Tuscon and Stony have just succeeded in bringing back to Steve Stinson his old-time fighting spirit, when a shot aimed through the window at Tuscon from the darkness outside, strikes Stinson on the scalp, for the moment knocking him out. With a lightning draw, Tuscon shoots and kills the would-be assassin.

A second raider is killed when the two

cowboys rush outside, lead streaming from their six-guns, but a third escapes.

Divining that the men are from Blackwood's Bar X 8, Tuscon decides to take the bodies of the dead men there, and tell Hawk to bury his own dead. The following morning he sets out alone, despite the protests of the Stinsons and Stony Brooke.

He arrives there, to find Blackwood away. Pretending to the men that he has decided to accept a previously made offer of Blackwood's to join him, he gains in part their confidence—especially that of Yank Healy, who, he later learns, has been forced to join Blackwood against his will, because of a past killing of which Blackwood has knowledge.

In a quarrel later in the day, two of the Bar X 8 men are killed by their own men; Tuscon kills a third. But when Blackwood arrives, he succeeds in catching Tuscon off guard, and disarms him.

The cowboy is saved by the timely arrival of Stony Brooke. After a fight between Stony and Brute Kenyon—an expugilist in Blackwood's employ—from which Stony emerges the victor, the two waddies prepare to leave. At that moment Marshal Laramie Lyons walks into the bunkhouse, guns leveled!

CHAPTER XII

Tuscon Gets the Drop

BUT Laramie Lyons had spoken too soon! He had arrived at the bunkhouse just as Stony was buckling on belt and gun, and, through a window at Tuscon's back, had settled in his mind the position of each man. Lyons hadn't given consideration to the fact that they might change positions, while he was making his way to the entrance. So it was that, as Lyons burst through the doorway, bellowing his command to "Stick 'em up!" he saw in the middle of the floor only Stony. By this time Tuscon had circled the gun-laden table, and was almost on top of the belligerent, but astounded, marshal.

Like a flash, Tuscon's gun was out. "You can put 'em up yourself, Lyons!" he ordered coolly.

Open-mouthed with surprise at not finding Tuscon where he had expected to, Lyons wheeled to find himself gazing into the black muzzle of Tuscon's forty-five!

Again a sudden silence descended on the room. Hawk Blackwood and his men had started forward, but checked themselves suddenly as Tuscon spoke. There was no getting away from the fact that Laramie held the drop on Stony, but the marshal was, in turn, well covered by Tuscon's gun.

"Don't make no false moves, Hawk," Stony snapped at last. "Lyons might get me, but I'd get you first. But I don't reckon Lyons is goin' to do no firin'—not with Tuscon holdin' a rod on him!"

At that moment Brute Kenyon groaned and moved slightly. Lyons looked down at the beaten man, and his eyes opened still wider. "My Gawd!" he gasped. "What's been goin' on here?"

"Plenty!" Tuscon ejaculated tersely. "And we ain't through yet. I ain't got no drinks to sell you this time, Laramie, so I'll just have to ask you to drop those guns, without givin' you anythin' for them—"

"Don't you do it, Laramie," Blackwood interrupted angrily. "It's up to you to arrest these two men. Smith has shot a coupla my men. The other feller helped him, an' in the bargain disabled Kenyon. They're murderers, both of 'em—"

"I said to drop those guns, Lyons," again came Tuscon's chill tones. "I won't ask you again."

Lyons considered but a moment, then dropped the two guns to the floor. Once more the fighting cowboys held the situation well in hand.

"I'll bust you for this, Lyons," Blackwood threatened furiously.

"*Your* bustin' will come later," Lyons remarked philosophically. "Smith was figurin' to do his bustin' *right at once.* Me, I always choose the lesser evil."

"Get down to the end of the room with Blackwood," Tuscon ordered next, "and don't lose a minute, Lyons. We've spent enough time around here, now."

Without another word the marshal moved down and joined his angry chief.

Tuscon kicked Lyons' guns out of the door, then turned to Stony. "Watch 'em close, pard. I'll be back in a jiffy." With that he disappeared in the direction of the corral.

Lyons and the others stood glaring their hate at Stony, who was holding two guns, now. They would have liked to rush him, but the risk was too great. A couple of the Mexicans shifted position, momentarily, and were extremely surprised at the alacrity with which Stony tilted a gun in their direction. "Mebbe your feet is gettin' tired," Stony grinned, "but we won't keep you much longer."

Marshal Lyons backed a trifle closer to Blackwood. "There's a thirty-two automatic in my hip pocket, Hawk," he spoke softly out of the corner of his mouth. "Took it off'n a drunk in town to-day. See if you can get it—"

But that was as far as he got. "You, Lyons," Stony spoke swiftly, "quit that whisperin' and move a few feet from Blackwood. I ain't trustin' you none."

Lyons didn't lose any time obeying the order, either.

Inside of five minutes Tuscon was back in the bunkhouse. It had required but an instant to get his own horse, but Stony's mount had strayed several yards in the darkness, and he hadn't been able to locate it at once.

"All right, Stony," Tuscon nodded as he came in. "Horses are waitin' for us to leave. Ready?"

"Just a minute." Stony gestured toward the table of captured weapons. "Goin' to take these with us?"

Tuscon shook his head. "Ain't a gun in the bunch that I'd carry to a dog fight," he remarked contemptuously. "We'll leave 'em here." He drew closer, spoke in low tones that didn't carry to the men at the other end of the bunkhouse, and finished up with, "I've piled a coupla boxes just outside the door. Jump high when you leave. The horses is just beyond."

Stony nodded his understanding, then Tuscon gave a last look around the room. His eyes lighted on Yank Healy, stretched in the bunk. "My pard sure squared things for you to-night, Healy. That's one satisfaction you got." Healy didn't answer, except for a slight nod.

And then, while the eyes of the Blackwood crew were on Healy and Tuscon, Stony leaped forward, raised one of his guns . . . thumbed two fast shots that swept the lamps from their brackets. Abruptly the place was plunged into darkness!

At the same instant Tuscon seized the corner of the gun-laden table, sent it whirling across the room, scattering the guns in all directions. Blackwood, Lyons and the rest of the gang rushed forward to cut off the cowboy's retreat, but were too slow. Flashes of crimson fire ran from Lyons' hand as he snapped the automatic into action. Only two shots, though, and both missed. After that the automatic jammed.

The bunkhouse was a bedlam of confusion. Some leaped for their guns scattered on the floor, others tried to get to the door and stop Tuscon and Stony. Men bumped together in the darkness, went crashing down from the force of the contact, rose, swearing and yelling, only to encounter other men. . . .

By this time Stony and Tuscon were in saddles. For a moment they sat laughing and listening to the frantic scramblings of the Blackwood faction. Finally a man burst from the bunkhouse door. The next instant he stumbled over the boxes Tuscon had placed before the doorway. There came the sound of splintering wood, grunts and curses filled the air, as more men came dashing out—only to go scrambling over their prone companions.

Stony and Tuscon spoke to their horses. The next instant they were riding like the wind, their mounts gathering speed with every jump. Lyons and Blackwood finally secured guns, came tearing down the roadway on foot, in pursuit of the two cowboys. Shot after shot thundered from their six-shooters, but Tuscon and Stony were riding too fast to make good targets. However, just by way of showing their contempt for the Bar X 8 crew, they turned in saddles and sent a salvo of bullets behind them. Hawk and Laramie immediately scurried for cover.

"Damn the luck!" Blackwood swore, as he peered cautiously around the corner of his ranch house. "This sure has been one bum night. Looks like those two cow-nurses had you bluffed, Laramie."

"Bluffed hell!" Lyons retorted bitterly. "I just know when I'm well off, that's all. I wa'n't goin' to plug that Stony hombre while Smith had me covered. You can't blame me for nothin', Hawk. They sure had you and your buckaroos tied in knots when I arrived, and I wa'n't expectin' trouble here. Just rode out to see if you'd heard anythin' from them two lately, and—" he sighed deeply and mopped the perspiration from his forehead—"and sure enough you had!"

At that moment the rest of the crowd came running up. "Do you want that we make thee follow of those hombre'?" one of the Mexicans asked.

"Hell, no!" Blackwood roared angrily. "They got too big a start. Go on back an' go to bed, you wuthless scum. You're dumber than dishwater, the hull pack of you. . . . Grizzly, you wait a minute."

While the others returned, crestfallen, to the bunkhouse, Behr remained behind. "What you want?" he asked sullenly.

"Got a job for you," Blackwood snapped. "Get your horse and slope down over the Line. Find four or five good gun-slingers. I'm payin' two-fifty a month. If you can find one good man with a crew of his own that ain't plumb yellow, I'll pay the leader an extra bonus of a hundred a month. Get goin', now, 'cause we've just about been cleaned out in the past twenty-four hours."

"Right, chief," Behr returned, hurrying away to the corral.

Meanwhile, Tuscon and Stony had been putting considerable distance between themselves and the Bar X 8. Finally, when some miles had slipped past beneath the pounding hoofs of their ponies, they slowed pace and drew closer together, riding stirrup to stirrup.

"Whew! That was close, what?" Tuscon laughed. "It was worth it, though, cowboy, just to see you bust that big bruiser wide open the way you did. How come you arrived, anyhow?"

"Got worried about you. Ain't I always pullin' you outa scrapes?" Stony queried. "I don't know what got into you, anyhow. Ridin' into that rattlers' nest thataway."

Tuscon explained: "I figured mebbe I could run a whizzer on Blackwood and join his gang. If he'd fell for my bluff, I coulda learned a lot, but nobody would admit nothin' I could hang 'em on, while I was there, and Blackwood was keen enough to get wise to what I was buildin' my loop for. Anyway, I was able to ferment a little trouble between two of the gang, and finished one myself. That's three outa the way. You put Kenyon on the rocks, and I reckon Blackwood will throw him outa camp, now."

As a matter of fact, Kenyon was never heard of after that night. He just dropped suddenly from sight. Doubtless Hawk Blackwood did have something to do with it.

"I'm sure admittin', cowboy," Tuscon resumed after a few minutes, "that I was *muy* pleased when you drifted through that bunkhouse door. How did you get there without nobody seein' you?"

"Nothin' to it," the other replied. "I stopped first at the cook shanty. The cook near went into convulsions when he looked up to find himself starin' into my gun. I told him if he kept still, that I wouldn't do nothin' to him, an' he was too scared to do anythin' else. I tied an' bound him with some of his towels, and then drifted over to the bunkhouse where you was kickin' up such a rumpus. You know the rest. . . . What's our next move?"

"We're goin' into politics," Tuscon announced promptly.

"Wha-a-at!" Stony's eyes bulged out in surprise.

"Yep," Tuscon nodded. "I've decided that Hawk Blackwood has got to have some opposition on that sheriff's job he's cravin' to land. Right now, he ain't got no opposition, but he will have."

"You figurin' to run against him?"

"Not me, but I'm aimin' to dig up a candidate."

Stony frowned. "You ain't goin' to run me, feller. I wouldn't mind bein' a dep-

uty, but they's too much work in the sheriffin' job. Sheriffs is always makin' out expense accounts, an' so on—"

"An' bein' as an honest man is needed," Tuscon finished, "you couldn't be trusted with an expense account. Nope, not you! I been castin' around in my mind, an' I've just about decided that Terry Kellicut's the man for the job."

Stony looked dubious. "Think Terry can beat Blackwood? He ain't so well known."

"He's got to beat him, that's all," Tuscon replied emphatically.

"Why do you say it that way?"

"For the simple reason, Stupid," Tuscon explained, "that we got to have the law on our side. Right now, this section of the country ain't got no law except what's made by Blackwood and enforced through Laramie Lyons. Don't you realize that Blackwood is chargin' us both with murder?"

"Gosh! I'd plumb forgot that," Stony grunted seriously.

"That means that we've got to keep out of Laramie Lyons' way, until Lyons is out of office. Otherwise, if we get caught, Blackwood will rush through a speedy trial, and you and me will be the guests of honor at a necktie party. C'mon, coax your hawss. We're goin' to see Terry Kellicut about this matter, plumb pronto and no foolin'!"

It was about midnight when the two punchers reached the Box TK. Most of Kellicut's men were asleep in the bunkhouse when Tuscon and Stony arrived, but Kellicut was still up, talking to his foreman, in the small ranch house where he lived. The foreman, Jeff Ringo, was a spare man, slightly past middle age, with shrewd gray eyes. He shook hands cordially with Tuscon and Stony, Kellicut produced a bottle of Bourbon, and the four settled down for a talk.

"How's things at the Slash S?" Terry asked, when the first libation had been poured and consumed.

"Was all right when I left early this mornin'," Tuscon gave the information, "but I ain't heard since. Me'n' Stony just pulled away from the Bar X 8 a little better than two hours ago. We didn't stop to pick no daisies when we were leavin', neither."

"Bar X 8!" Kellicut exclaimed.

Tuscon told the story, commencing with the shooting of Frane and Vandercook at the Slash S on the previous night, told how he had delivered the bodies to the Blackwood crew and the succeeding adventures that had befallen, ending with, "It'd been worth ten years of your life to see Stony wipe the floor with that Kenyon hombre."

"You sure musta taught them snakes a lesson," Jeff Ringo declared.

Kellicut took a more serious viewpoint of the affair. "The whole thing looks pretty bad to me," he stated. "There's gotta be a limit to the things that Blackwood can get away with around here. When he's elected sheriff, things will be worse—"

"That's what we mostly come to see you about," Tuscon broke in. "On the way here, me'n Stony held a convention and decided to nominate you for that job. 'Course, it was a cut-and-dried proposition in my mind, before I said anythin' to Stony, but for that matter, all the conventions held nowadays are cut-and-dried propositions, so it don't make no difference, so long as you accept."

Kellicut was looking at the two men in wonder. "What, me?" he gasped. "Me, run for sheriff? Why, I wouldn't stand a show—ain't got the money to put into it, anyway—"

"It's a rattlin' good idea, Terry," Ringo interrupted. "You got brains, and aside from the Bar X 8 you own the biggest ranch around here. The Slash S don't count, bein' as it's run down so."

Kellicut laughed shortly. "*Own* the biggest ranch, did you say?" he asked. "It may be in my name, but it ain't all paid for yet. That's why I say I ain't got the money for a political campaign. I ain't no speechmaker, neither."

"Speeches don't count so much, anyhow," Ringo pointed out. "You ain't been in this part of the country long, but everybody except the Blackwood crowd liked you. Go on, give Blackwood a run for

his money, anyway. Are we goin' to take our lickin' layin' down?"

Tuscon and Stony added fresh arguments to the conversation, and by the time gray dawn came creeping through the windows of the house, Kellicut had consented, somewhat dubiously, to run for office.

"That's fine," Tuscon said heartily. "Now, we'll get down to real business. Lemme have a coupla boxes of greased ca'tridges, will you, Terry—that is, if you got some on hand."

Kellicut nodded and without asking the reason, rose to carry out Tuscon's request.

"What you aimin' to do, now?" Stony asked curiously.

"Show you in a minute," Tuscon replied.

Kellicut returned with the cartridges, Tuscon broke open the boxes and wiped some of the grease on a piece of newspaper. This he mixed with a quantity of powder-black procured from the guns of the four men. None of the weapons had been cleaned recently. The mixture of grease and powder-black produced a sort of black paste. "H'm-m," Tuscon commented, as he manipulated the mess, "I'll have to dig up more powder-black—have to borrow a coupla tubes of your gun grease, too, Terry, if I'm goin' to have enough. . . ."

Without explaining why, he started to rub some of the stuff into his red hair.

"Say, have you gone plumb nuts?" Stony demanded, while the other two men looked on with astonished gaze.

For answer Tuscon displayed a blackened lock of hair, into which some of the ebon paste had been rubbed. "How's that?" he asked.

"It it was that way all over your thick head," Stony grumbled, "you'd look like a Mex. You're sun-browned black enough. But what's the idea?"

"You got the idea," Tuscon laughed, working more of the blackened grease into his hair. "I aims to look like a Mex. With Laramie Lyons on my trail it ain't goin' to be safe nohow for Tuscon Smith to hang around Cuarta City. On t'other hand, nobody ain't goin' to pay no atteniton to a greaser. I aims to go Mex, cowboy. Don't you get the idea? I've worked this stunt before, and I'll do it again."

"By Godfrey! You did learn somethin', livin' below the Border, didn't you?" Stony exclaimed admiringly. "Gimme some of that goo. I'm goin' to go Mex, too."

"Nope," Tuscon refused. "Your job is to stay at the Slash S an' give 'em any protection they may need. Now, keep your noisy trap shut for a spell. Us conventioners and candidate, is goin' to lay campaign plans!"

CHAPTER XIII

Judge Mandell Gets a Scare

TERRY KELLICUT'S first move the next day was to go to Cuarta City, taking his punchers with him. Here he circulated around town among friends, securing the names of men who approved his candidacy in the coming election for sheriff. Only a few names were required on his petition, and a short time later Kellicut went to Judge Mandell's office in the county house and requested the judge to make an official announcement of the fact that Hawk Blackwood was to receive some opposition.

Mandell was a long-nosed, shifty-eyed old hypocrite, with a tobacco-stained beard, who pretended to stand for law and order, but instead carried out any commands that Blackwood gave him.

"H'm-m," Mandell grunted. "This is likely to cause trouble, Kellicut. Why not let things stand as they are? Blackwood will make a good sheriff."

"That's where you and me disagree," Terry replied shortly. "I'm wonderin' just what you mean by sayin' it will cause trouble, too."

Mandell saw he had said too much. "I spoke without thinking," he replied hastily. "Why do you want me to spread the news of your candidacy?"

"Mostly, because you're a sort of leading man in town," Kellicut explained. "Everybody knows you—even if they don't like you." He couldn't resist that shot.

Mandell's face reddened. "It isn't my fault I am not popular," he whined. "I

always do my best to please everybody. Here's another thing: it's too late, now, to get your name printed on the ballots—"

"Horseradish!" Kellicut cut in. "I'm not swallowin' that bunk, Mandell. I happen to be aware of the fact that they don't hold elections here the same way they do in the big towns. Cuarta City never has used a printed ballot, and doesn't intend to this time. I just want your word that I'll get a square deal on the voting and counting."

Mandell looked nasty. "It won't be my fault if there's any trouble. I'll do my best, but if something goes wrong—"

"Don't let anything go wrong," Kellicut advised icily. "You give orders to Blackwood that he ain't to start nothin'. Tell him there's a limit to how much you can cover his dirty moves—"

"Here, here!" Mandell interposed. "What are you saying? You can't talk that way. I'm a justice of the court—"

"You won't be much longer," Terry snapped, "unless you quit playing fast and loose with this town." He was growing angry, now. "If you think the situation is beyond you, say the word. A wire to the governor will bring some soldiers down here to see that the election goes off without a fight. Now what you goin' to do?"

Mandell had suddenly gone pale. The last thing he wanted was to see soldiers coming into Cuarta City. While he wasn't exactly head of the town, still certain officials of the state government had placed responsibilities on his shoulders. Mandell was greedy for power and wanted to climb higher. "It—it won't be necessary to bring the governor into this," he stammered, visibly shaken by Terry's words. "I promise to do my best to see that this election is run on the square."

"That's all I'm askin'," Terry nodded. He slammed his sombrero on his head and walked out of the office without another word. He had hardly reached the street, when Mandell sent for Blackwood.

"It's like this, Hawk," Mandell explained, when Blackwood appeared in the office. "Terry Kellicut has decided to oppose you on the ticket for sheriff."

"Huh?" Then, when Blackwood had recovered from his surprise, he added in ugly tones, "Kellicut is due to get a bullet through his carcass!"

"That's just what we want to avoid," Mandell protested. He told of the conversation just held with Terry, and finished by saying, "You've got to go easy, Hawk. We don't want soldiers down here. Can't you win this election without resorting to—er—undue methods?"

Hawk stared blankly at the floor a minute, then laughed easily. "Now that I come to think it over, Judge, there ain't nothin' to worry about, anyhow. Kellicut ain't well enough known to beat me, and if he should commence to get too many votes, I'll spread a lot of loose change around. That'll fix things, and nobody can object. Sure, we'll run the election without trouble. I got it sewed up in a bag, right now. The trouble for Kellicut will come after I've got that star pinned to my vest.

"I'll even give Laramie Lyons orders that he's to do all he can to keep down any fuss. If I do have to use strong-arm methods, I'll work in such a way that they won't be able to hang it onto you, or me. Don't worry. Everythin' will run off finer than hair on a snake's belly."

And with that Blackwood took his departure, leaving behind him, despite his assurances, a very much worried judge.

Terry Kellicut at once got busy, and with a few brief instructions to his punchers, sent them riding to other ranches and settlements throughout Cuarta County, that as many voters as possible might know that he was a candidate for office. At this late date, that was about all he could do, aside from talking personally to the nearby ranchers whom he felt might support him.

Friends procured pieces of board and strips of tin upon which were painted the words: Kellicut for Sheriff. These were placed in prominent positions throughout Cuarta City. Upon seeing these posters, Hawk Blackwood ordered several similar signs made, bearing his own name. As was to be expected, the signs made excellent targets, and before two days had

passed were riddled with bullet holes. Kellicut's announcement of his candidacy created little comment. There were several dog fights held, with the combatants named Kellicut and Blackwood, two or three arguments that ended in two or three killings, and the campaign was under way.

The days drifted along toward election. Terry Kellicut had done his best, but he felt that it wasn't quite good enough. He rode out to the Slash S one morning to see how things were going. Stony had been working around the buildings, spreading whitewash and making repairs. By this time the Slash S had but few cows left, and while Stinson felt that the Bar X 8 was responsible for the rustling, still there was no proof to go on. Teddy had given up riding the range, and was staying at home with her father and Sleepy Hatch.

When Kellicut arrived he found Stony plying a vigorous hammer in an attempt to fix up the dilapidated wire fence that surrounded the Slash S buildings.

"H'yah, cowboy," Kellicut greeted, dropping from his horse. "Keepin' busy?"

Stony nodded as he dropped his hammer. "Yeah, but this ain't the sorta business I like most. My gun is gettin' plumb restless, layin' idle thisaway."

The two men sat down in the shade of a mesquite bush and commenced rolling brown paper cigarettes. "How's the campaign goin', Terry?" Stony asked, exhaling twin jets of gray smoke through his nostrils.

Kellicut shook his head. "It looks like I'd be licked," he replied dubiously. "I got into this thing too late. You see, Blackwood had a big start on me, and he's been talkin' about his candidacy ever since he run the present sheriff out of Cuarta City. Course, folks don't know, or can't realize, that Blackwood run him out, 'cause the feller won't admit that he was too yeller to stay."

"Can't you convince people throughout the county how things stand?" Stony queried.

"Some of them, yes," Kellicut admitted, "but the others just ain't interested enough. The way it looks to me, Blackwood and I will split even on votes through the county, not counting Cuarta City. Cuarta City bein' the biggest town in Cuarta County, is the decidin' factor. Whatever way Cuarta City goes, will show whether Blackwood wins, or me."

"And Cuarta City bein' Blackwood's town, as you might say," Stony frowned, "it will swing the election his way, eh?"

"That's it. Otherwise, the best I could do is to give Blackwood a strong fight, and, mebbe, divide the county with him. So you see, Stony, it looks like I'm licked right now. I can't do the impossible."

The two men sat talking a while longer, then Teddy Stinson came out and joined them. "Do you expect any trouble from Blackwood on election day?" Teddy wanted to know.

"Ain't expectin' none," Kellicut replied, with a shake of his head. "You see, Teddy, in the first place, I've got Judge Mandell pretty well scared that I'll get soldiers down here, and I think he's told Blackwood to run things on the square. That's the way it looks anyway, 'cause Blackwood has been as nice as pie to me, invitin' me to drink with him, and everythin'. In the second place, there ain't goin' to be no need of trouble." He paused and explained the situation, ending with, "—Blackwood being sure of beating me out on the election, there ain't no cause for him to start a rumpus."

"Just the same," Teddy advised seriously, "I'd be prepared. You might get more votes than you expect."

"Regardless of how many votes I'll get from different parts of Cuarta County," Terry answered, "it's the voters in Cuarta City that will do the electing—and Blackwood controls Cuarta City! Of course, I'll take the necessary precautions. I'm goin' to have my punchers stationed at the polls to see that I get a square deal, and that none of the Blackwood supporters vote twice, and so on. I'm figurin' to have your father and Sleepy Hatch on hand, too, to sorta oversee things for me."

"And you'll have me and Tuscon to back you up, too," Stony reminded.

"By the way, has anyone seen Tuscon lately?" Teddy asked. "Is he still hanging around town in that Mexican disguise?"

Stony grinned, nodded. "Yeah, I took a chance on Laramie Lyons not seein' me last night, and rode in to see could I find Tuscon—"

"That *is* takin' a chance, cowboy," Kellicut protested. "Lyons thinks you and Tuscon have ducked outa this section. Lucky you was away that day he called here, lookin' for you."

"I ain't worryin'," Stony replied. "Anyway, as I started to say, I located Tuscon down in the Mex Quarter. He's livin' all alone in one of them 'dobe huts. I don't know where he got 'em, but he's got a coupla goats there, an' pretends to the rest of the greasers that he's goin' in for raisin' the danged animals—"

"Do the Mexicans actually think that Tuscon is a Mexican?" Teddy asked incredulously.

Stony nodded. "They ain't doubtin' it for a minute. He dang near fooled me for that matter. He's wearin' dirty white clothes an' goin' barefoot. Let his mustache grow, too, although he says it keeps him busy puttin' that black grease on. Lord, he was dirty! He can sling Mex lingo like a native, you know, and havin' spent a lot of time down in *mañana* land, he sure knows their ways. With them two goats to start on, the greasers consider him a wealthy man. Already two or three of his neighbors are tryin' to marry off their daughters to him. Tuscon says for me to tell you, Terry, for Gawd's sake hurry up an' win that election. He can't stand it much longer."

The others laughed. "What's the idea of the disguise, anyway?" Teddy wanted to know.

"It gives him a chance to hang around Cuarta City, and see can he find out anythin' about Blackwood. Said to tell you he hadn't learned nothin' yet, though. I didn't talk to him only for a minute or two. He done chased me out, bein' afraid that somebody'd see me there and get wise to his game. I don't imagine I'll get down to see him again before the election gets started."

A short time later Sleepy Hatch sent up the call for dinner, and the three filed into the house.

CHAPTER XIV

Tuscon Smith, Politician

ELECTION DAY dawned bright and hot. Cuarta City had decided to declare a holiday, with shooting and riding contests to augment the event. The people of the town had to do something for excitement, inasmuch as the race for sheriff wasn't close enough to be thrilling. By mid-morning there was scarcely a man to be found who didn't concede the election to Hawk Blackwood. The earliest returns had shown that Cuarta City was electing Blackwood, and nothing the remainder of the county would do could change things materially.

An empty store a short distance away from Blackwood's honkytonk, the Española Palace, served as the polls. Inside the store, at a table near the doorway, sat Stephen Stinson and a man named Pritchard. Pritchard usually acted as a sort of manager in the Española Palace, but today he was looking out for Blackwood's interests in the voting. Stinson was performing a similar service for Terry Kellicut. By mutual agreement, both Stinson and Pritchard had laid aside their guns.

At a second table, several yards from the doorway, sat Judge Mandell, with a small tin box before him. The process of voting was a very simple one: the voter entered the polls and received as a ballot at the first table a slip of paper, numbered in ink and penciled with the initials of Stinson and Pritchard.

Next, the voter passed on to Judge Mandell's table where he wrote on the ballot the name of his candidate, then gave it to Mandell who placed it in the tin box, after first making a record on a tally sheet near at hand. In the event the voter didn't know how to write, that service was accomplished for him by either Pritchard or Stinson, depending upon which candidate was getting the vote.

Mandell totaled up the ballots every hour. Doubtless the crooked judge would have faked the count in Blackwood's favor, but he didn't dare in the face of what Kellicut had told him. Anyway, it didn't look as though anything of the kind

would be necessary, and for once in his life Mandell was turning in an honest count.

Outside the polls were Kellicut's punchers, ready to jump into action should their employer's interests be threatened. However, nothing of the kind took place, and the cowboys were wishing that they might leave to attend the riding and shooting contests which were being held just outside of town.

These contests produced just one surprise: while the prizes for riding were won by various punchers from nearby ranches, every point in the shooting contest was taken by four strangers who had recently arrived in Cuarta City: Ghost McCoy, a tall, slim man with a gray, skull-like face; Gunsight Ferguson, short and stocky; Sonora Pierce, a swarthy, raw-boned quarter-breed; and Quirt Roberts, a scowling individual with bad eyes. These four each carried a brace of six-shooters, and were Blackwood's recently hired gunmen, Ghost McCoy being the leader of the crew. Men looked on in awe as they watched the four pick off targets with monotonous regularity.

By noontime Cuarta City's main street was thronged with people returning from the contests. At the Española Palace and the Warbonnet, Hawk Blackwood was making himself popular through the medium of dispensing free drinks. Each time a count on the votes was received, the drinks were on the house.

Among the loungers hanging about the Española Palace was a vile-smelling Mexican peon, dressed in loose, flapping clothes. His feet were bare, but on his head was a high-peaked straw sombrero with a considerably dilapidated brim. Hunched high about the fellow's shoulders and chin was a green-and-red-striped serape, sadly faded and soiled.

The peon squatted in the dust on the shady side of the building. His torn hat brim hung loosely down over his face, but through a rift in the straw braiding one eye shone dully forth and listlessly contemplated the passing scene, or considered with slight interest a wandering ant that ran busily across his dust-encrusted toes.

Occasionally one dirty brown hand would wander inside the peon's shirt, and the fingers would explore his ribs in a period of blissful scratching. A mangy dog sneaked close, sniffed meticulously at the peon's clothing. The peon lacked the ambition to send it away, but at the man's first move for tobacco and a corn-husk paper the animal was started into action, and quickly scurried out of reach. A cigarette was commenced, but before it could be finished, the Mexican's head had lolled to one side, and a long-drawn snore was leaving the half-open mouth.

The peon was roused by sudden cheers from the interior of the Española Palace. A man came running outside, beckoning to the loungers about the place. "Come a-runnin', fellers. Hawk's buyin' a drink on the last count we received."

A sudden rush ensued as men passed through the door. The peon with many grunts and sighs, scrambled slowly to his feet and followed the crowd inside.

Inside, the honkytonk was a bedlam. Men were cheering loudly. Three perspiring bartenders were working feverishly behind the long bar. For the moment the games of chance ranged along the opposite side of the room were idle, but there existed plenty of evidence to show that the gamblers were making hay while the sun shone.

Above the bar, in plain sight where everyone could see, hung a large cardboard placard bearing the following notations, scrawled with a piece of black crayon:

Blackwood .....216 votes
Kellicut ..... 78 votes

"Wow!" a man yelled. "Kellicut's sure takin' a beatin'! By twelve to-night, when the votes are all in, Hawk will be sheriff!"

"Shucks!" his companion responded. "It's just as good as finished right now. We don't need to wait until the end of the voting to know that Hawk's won!"

"Step up, gents, and nominate your poison," Blackwood was inviting from behind the bar. He was smiling genially on everyone. "The drinks are free and

they'll stay free just as long as I remain ahead on the voting, so if you want to drink, it's up to you hombres to put me in office. I'm promisin' I won't be too severe on lawbreakers. Men has got to have their fling, and if you want to go down to the Mex Quarter and have some fun, it won't do the greasers no good to complain. As sheriff I'll see that the whites get a square deal." He winked that everyone might see, then added, "Of course, I stand for law and order. Drink hearty, boys, to the broadest-minded sheriff Cuarta City will ever have!"

The crowd surged to the bar, among them the Mexican peon. "I t'ink, Meester Barkeep, I take of thee *tequila,*" the peon requested, feeling the surly eyes of a bartender upon him.

"You got any money?" the barkeep growled.

"*Nada*—but theese dreenks, you geeve them for—for—what you call heem?—for nothing, no?" The one eye peeping through the mangled hat-brim was pleading, innocent—and thirsty.

"No!" thundered the server of drinks. "Not to greasers! Hawk is settin' 'em up for the white men—the voters, see?" The man's voice took on an ugly note: "What in hell you doin' in here, anyhow? The Española don't want no Mexes hangin' around. *Vamos, pronto!*"

The peon sighed, and turned away, his dilapidated hat flopping down on his face with each step. A drunken bystander aimed a savage kick at him as he passed on his way to the doorway, but the peon dodged adroitly, for one so seemingly shiftless, and continued through the crowd to the street, amid the laughter of Blackwood and the rest of the men.

On the sidewalk the peon stood lost in thought for a moment, then shuffled down the street to the Boston General Store. The store was deserted at this hour, save for the fat proprietor, Hefty Burns.

Hefty waved a protesting, languid hand of refusal from his well-filled arm chair, when the peon entered. "Go away and don't bother me, Mex," he grumbled. "I ain't givin' no credit to-day."

"But, señor, I have of thee monee," the Mexican replied earnestly. "I do not ask for credit. I would buy thee Bull Durham an' othair theengs. I have thee gold —e-see?"

The clinking of coins brought Hefty struggling to his feet. "My Gawd! Mex!" he puffed. "You been stickin' up the Española?"

The peon shook his head, showed white teeth in a wide smile. "Eet is the day of *elección*—what you call thee holiday, no? My people are poor, but I like for them to celebrate, *también.* I buy thee tobac', thee bandan', thee lofely jewelry. Comes thee Christmas time for thee Mejicanos." Again that white-toothed smile.

"Christmas?" Hefty repeated dubiously. "I never knew it come this time of year—hell! it don't make no difference, anyhows, if you got money to buy, Mex."

And the Mex did. He cleaned Hefty out of his stock of Bull Durham and Lobo Negro. Next he purchased a large collection of cheap jewelry—brooches, rings, scarfpins—the sort that may be had for a dime apiece in the cheap city stores. Several dozen imitation silk bandannas were next added to the heap on the counter, as were a large number of gaudy neckties.

When the peon had finished purchasing he bundled the lot into a large square of old canvas which Hefty donated, threw it up on his shoulder and scuffed off in the direction of the Mexican Quarter.

Hefty Burns stood in the doorway, gazing after him in amazement. "Damn if he didn't have the money to pay for it, too," he gasped. "That Mex wa'n't no man's fool, neither, the way he bargained down my figures. I'll swear that's the first time I ever reduced prices for anybody, but shucks! when a feller buys in quantities like that I can afford to sell cheap. . . ." He settled down in his chair again, then added, "What the devil does Election Day have to do with Christmas? Wonder how the election is goin', anyhow."

At four o'clock that afternoon Blackwood was still serving free drinks. The figures on the voting now stood: Blackwood, 302 votes; Kellicut, 101 votes.

It certainly looked bad for Terry. . . .

The afternoon dwindled into night. The votes were coming in slower now, but each count showed a greater gain for Blackwood than it did for Terry Kellicut. Already, Cuarta City was having a taste of the conditions that would be in order when Sheriff Blackwood was in office. The street were reeling with drunken men, fights became so numerous that even Marshal Laramie Lyons grew a bit anxious, and tried to stop them, before the town got out of hand.

As the evening progressed, it grew wilder. The air was filled with the cracking of firearms. Several killings occurred, and the two doctors of Cuarta City were kept on the jump, attending to the wounded.

Stony rode in after dark, and walked with Kellicut around the town, taking good care that he didn't encounter Laramie Lyons. If any other of Blackwood's friends noticed the cowboy, they were too drunk to recognize him. Stony had tried, but failed, to locate Tuscon. A visit to his partner's hut in the Mexican Quarter had found the door locked, and Tuscon's newly-made Mexican friends refused absolutely to give any information to a white man, regarding one they supposed to be of their own race.

At the Española Palace the ten o'clock count had just been received. The figures above the bar read:

Blackwood .....438 votes
Kellicut .....147 votes

"Nothin' can go wrong, now," Blackwood yelled triumphantly, from his position behind the bar. "With less than two hours to vote, all hell couldn't save Kellicut. I'm bettin' they won't be a change of ten votes on either candidate between now and midnight. Everybody's through votin', and I'm the next sheriff of Cuarta City."

Blackwood's four gunmen lounged at the bar. "How about the returns from the rest of the county, Hawk?" Ghost McCoy asked.

Blackwood smiled confidently. "They won't be in until to-morrow, or next day, but it won't make no difference. I've had men out checking up for the past two weeks. The best Kellicut can do is split the county with me. I'll concede him that much, because he's sure been workin' like the devil. Done better than I expected. But it's Cuarta City's vote that tells the tale, and Cuarta City has elected Hawk Blackwood! Up to the bar, boys, you're drinkin' to a new sheriff!"

By now, Blackwood's invitations weren't eliciting the response they had earlier in the day. Instead of surging up, the crowd staggered — those who were able to stagger. A goodly number were asleep in corners and on the floor. Some were sprawled in the streets, powerless to move. This time it was a bleary-eyed crowd of uncertain gait that made its way to the long bar, and reached for drinks.

"Fill 'em up, again, boys," Blackwood ordered his bartenders. "This'll be the last free drink to-night. It's cost me a heap of money, but I've won the election like I do everythin' I start out to win! Fill 'em up and drink 'em down! Here's to crime!"

He was just lifting a modest glass of whiskey to his lips, when Laramie Lyons came running through the doorway.

"Just in time, Laramie," Grizzly Behr called. "We're drinkin' to the new sheriff—"

"Cut it out," Lyons snapped, wild-eyed. "And get busy! You musta been sleepin', Hawk. Where's your wits? There's hell to pay—"

"What you talkin' about?" Blackwood demanded, slowly setting down his glass. The man's voice was curiously flat and dry as though he had a presentiment of disaster.

"We've been outguessed, that's all!" Lyons panted.

The room had gone strangely quiet, the crowd looking on in open-mouthed, drunken amazement. Behr, McCoy, Sonora Pierce, Quirt Roberts, and Ferguson gathered closer to the marshal, their lips framing the words that wouldn't come.

Blackwood leaned far over the bar. "What you talkin' about, Laramie?" he repeated hoarsely.

"Every man in — in the — Mexican Quarter is down at the polls—votin'," Lyons stammered.

"Huh, is that all?" Blackwood grunted. He wasn't greatly worried, now, his mind refusing to accept the importance of Lyons' words. "I never knew the greasers to take no interest before—"

Lyons was nearly wild. "Don't you understand?" he half yelled. "*They're* votin' *for Kellicut!* That Mex peon that was kicked outa here to-day was Tuscon Smith! He's been livin' with the greasers, and has swung 'em all into line. You're licked unless you can stop it, Hawk!"

Hawk Blackwood went suddenly pale. His hands gripped the edge of the wooden bar until all of the blood was forced out of his fingers. He appeared to be stunned by the news. Twice his mouth opened and shut convulsively; somehow, his tongue refused to function. . . .

"Well, what you aimin' to do about it?" Lyons queried tersely. "Are you asleep, or somethin'?"

Hawk shook his head as though dazed. He couldn't get his mind in order. "Did you say Tuscon Smith was in town?" he asked dully.

Lyons nodded. "Yeah, disguised as a Mex. For Gawd's sake snap awake, Hawk! Every minute you lose means that many more votes for Kellicut."

But Blackwood couldn't shake off his bewilderment. "Tuscon Smith in town," he repeated slowly. "You shoulda arrested him, Laramie, like I give you orders to—"

"Arrested him! Good Lord!" Laramie Lyons was jumping up and down in his excitement. "He had his pardner with him—that Stony Brooke hombre. I didn't think you'd want me to take time to make no arrests. It's more important that you snap into it, and stop them greasers from votin'. I threw down on Tuscon, but I was shootin' too fast—missed! Smith didn't lose no time payin' back the compliment, neither. Lookit my hat!"

Aggrievedly, Lyons removed his sombrero, and displayed two neat holes drilled in the front and back of the crown.

"What's your orders, Chief?" Ghost McCoy asked. "We're waitin' to go."

"Can't Mandell or Pritchard stop them—" Blackwood commenced.

"Mandell and Pritchard can't stop nothin'," Lyons broke in frantically. "That Sleepy Hatch from the Slash S is holdin' a gun on Mandell to see that he counts straight. Pritchard ain't got no gun on. Old Stephen Stinson is gettin' writer's cramp from writin' out ballots for them greasers, and Kellicut has got six punchers there, herdin' the greasers into line. Your goose is cooked, Hawk, unless you show a mite of life. For Gawd's sake come awake! Are you goin' to show a yellow streak, now?"

Those last words galvanized Hawk Blackwood to action. Seizing the edge of the bar with his powerful hands, he vaulted clear over to the opposite side, landing in front of his hired gunmen.

"No, by Gawd!" he cried, "I ain't showin' yellow. I was just plumb surprised by the news and couldn't think straight for a minute. Now, we'll get busy. It ain't too late. I'll beat Kellicut, yet! You boys go on over to the polls—rub out all them Box TK men of Kellicut's. You won't need to bother about the greasers. They'll scatter at the first shot. The polls with be closed in another hour or so. All we got to do is keep 'em away until then."

He wheeled about and started for the door. "C'mon, men. I'm headin' this fight." He paused for just a moment, turned to the crowd: "You fellers better come, too, if you want to see Hawk Blackwood in office!"

Shocked out of their drunkenness, the crowd leaped forward, following closely on the heels of Blackwood and his men. They had almost reached the doorway, when Tuscon and Stony came bounding into the building. Tuscon was still in his ragged, peon disguise, but his straw sombrero was gone, and there was no doubt as to his identity now. Gone also was the shiftless, lazy manner so evident earlier in the day. Both Stony and Tuscon were carrying extra guns, and all four weapons were leveled directly at Hawk Blackwood and his crowd.

"Stop right where you are, Blackwood,"

Tuscon yelled, jamming both six-shooters into Hawk's stomach. "You're stayin' here until every last man has had a chance to vote!"

CHAPTER XV

A New Sheriff!

BLACKWOOD stopped so suddenly he nearly tipped over backwards, and his henchmen came running into him from behind. Stony drove the gang back with his guns. "Get back there, you sunzabuzzards, back!" he bawled. "And every man jack of you stick his hands plumb high!"

The sudden appearance of the two cowboys swept the crowd off its feet, overcome as it was by surprise. Tuscon removed one gun from Blackwood's middle, to enforce his pardner's commands. "I'm shootin' on the least excuse," he threatened. "Blackwood, you stay here, close to my gun. Tell your men to back away and not to touch walnut. If you don't, I'm pluggin' you plenty pronto!"

"Don't start nothin', boys," Blackwood ordered hastily. His face was the color of chalk. "Smith has got the drop on me, I'm a goner if you do."

The crowd appeared willing to receive the order, and quickly dropped back before the guns of the two cowboys. Only Behr, Lyons, and the four gunmen acted as though they might start trouble.

"Make it strong, Blackwood," Tuscon snapped, "unless you want to find yourself surrounded by six silver handles! I ain't talkin' just to make conversation."

"Lay off, boys," Blackwood urged earnestly. "No use makin' trouble, now. Mebbe somethin' will happen to give us the upper hand, before twelve o'clock." But, now, there was a hopeless note in his voice.

Sullenly, the gunmen retreated away from the two cowboys and their captive. Behr and Lyons were the first to make a move; Ghost McCoy and his three men were reluctant to give in so easily. They had been hired to fight, and the attitude of Blackwood brought them nothing but disgust.

"Turn around, Blackwood," Tuscon ordered next. "I don't trust you when you're facin' me. The only way for you to feel plumb safe is to lean against my gun muzzle as hard as you can. We'll just move easy-like away from this doorway, too. I ain't figurin' to have any of your friends bust up this party from behind."

Blackwood's face fell. That was exactly what he had been looking for, and now, with that chance gone, all of his hopes were dissipated. The two cowboys, holding Blackwood before them, moved to one side of the room, just a few feet away from the high, double-doored entrance. Here, it would be impossible to take them by surprise; on the other hand, it would prove an advantageous point of departure in case the four gunmen refused to obey Blackwood's orders.

"How about it, cowboy," Stony suggested, when the tension had lessened a trifle, "shall we make 'em unbuckle their guns?"

Tuscon frowned, glowered menacingly at the gunmen and the rest of the crowd. "Let 'em keep their hardware," he growled. "Mebbe one of 'em will get up nerve enough to start somethin', and I'll have an excuse to plug him." His voice rose threateningly, "I'm just achin' to throw lead through some of you snakes, so you better keep them hands above your shoulders."

The bluff worked. Had Tuscon and Stony tried to disarm the gunmen, the action might have brought on a rebellion, and Tuscon, knowing the psychology of their breed, chose the wiser course, fully aware of the fact that he and Stony would be wiped out if the killers chose to take a chance and rush them.

Only Sonora Pierce voiced the slightest objection: "Say, feller," he rasped, "my arms are gettin' tired. I can't hold 'em in the air all night."

"That's just too damn bad," Tuscon laughed. "Fold 'em on top of your head, then. That'll take the strain off. You won't have to hold 'em up all night, either. Just until twelve o'clock, or a mite after."

"Hey, Tuscon," Stony observed suddenly. "Don't them four hombres look kinda familiar?"

"Sure they do," came the prompt answer. "You just recognized 'em, eh, waddy? I spotted 'em a few days ago, when they first come to town. McCoy, Pierce, Ferguson and Roberts—them's the names."

"Where'd you ever see us before?" Ghost McCoy asked coolly.

"You was workin' with the Mex soldiers when they busted up old Jose Cordano's rebel army," Tuscon grinned. "Don't you remember two greasers that joined up with your outfit, got a lot of information, and then deserted back to the rebels—"

"You ain't them greasers—" McCoy commenced.

"That's us," Tuscon laughed. "We fooled you complete. We would have licked you, too, only Cordano run short of money and couldn't buy food for his soldiers."

"Shows you ain't got much sense, joinin' them rebels," McCoy sneered.

"I dunno about the sense," Tuscon retorted, "but we don't play any sure-thing bets like you four hombres. We like to take a chance and get some fun outa life. There ain't nothin' like throwin' in with a losin' game and pullin' it out top-side up."

"You didn't do any winnin' with Cordano," Quirt Roberts growled.

"No, but we had a lotta fun. Right now, though, we're pullin' a losin' game to the top of the heap, and that's somethin' that Blackwood didn't expect; did you, Hawk?" The question was accompanied by a jab from the gun barrel.

Blackwood squirmed. "Aw, go to hell!" he growled.

"Naughty, naughty," Tuscon reproved. "You oughta learn to take your whiskey neat and your losses pleasant, Hawk. You didn't use your head, that's all. Just because the Mexican Quarter never was enough interested to poll a vote, you didn't think they was worth considerin'. You was so sure you'd win, that you plumb forgot they was citizens of Cuarta City, and, as such, entitled to a vote."

"Think you're danged clever, don't you?" Blackwood muttered sullenly.

"Nope," Tuscon denied modestly. "I just used my head a mite. I moved down among the Mexicans and lived with 'em like a brother—"

"You don't need to tell us that," Stony put in. "You smell plumb filthy, cowboy, and the garlic on your breath is terrible. I feel sorry for Blackwood, him havin' to stay so near to you—"

"As I say," Tuscon went on, grinning cheerfully, "I lived with 'em like a brother, and they got to like me a heap. Then I kinda spread the information that Hawk Blackwood was an enemy of mine —which is more or less true, ain't it, Hawk? Next I told the whole Mex Quarter that they'd be doin' a favor for me, if they did their dangedest to defeat Hawk. In fact, I promised every family a present, if Kellicut won. I reckon he has by this time."

"Aw-aw-w!" Blackwood sputtered.

"Instead of gettin' mad like this," Tuscon advised pleasantly, "you ought to be framin' a message of congratulation to your opponent, Hawk. That's political etikette, after a campaign. First you sling a lot of mud at each other, then when you're licked you smile like you was old friends and shake hands." He shook his head sorrowfully. "I'm afeard you won't never make a politician, Hawk. All you done was pass out drinks. I ain't never yet seen nobody smokin' one of your cigars."

"I didn't give cigars, but I'm goin' to do what amounts to the same thing when I get through here. I got a lot of jewelry and bandannas and tobacco and neckties to pass out to the loyal Mexican supporters of Terry Kellicut. They fall for that sorta thing more than they would cigars."

"Tuscon is right, Hawk," Stony put in earnestly. "You should have laid in a supply of campaign cigars. They're cheap and wouldn't cost you much, 'cause mostly they're made of rope—"

"Migosh, Stony," Tuscon protested hastily, "don't mention rope to Hawk. It might have an allusion that you give him heart failure. Hawk, you wouldn't want nobody to talk rope, where you're concerned, would you, now?"

"Dammit! How long is this farce goin' to keep up?" Blackwood cursed angrily.

There was extreme surprise in Tuscon's answer: "Farce?" he repeated. "This ain't no farce, Hawk. I thought you understood it was plumb serious." He paused thoughtfully, then, "Danged if you ain't got the makin's of a politician, at that. You don't never seem able to realize when a crisis is takin' place!"

The gunmen were getting restless, now. "Hell's bells!" Sonora Pierce ejaculated suddenly. "I ain't goin' to stand this much longer. My arms are plumb weary."

"Oh, ain't you?" Stony demanded sarcastically. He tilted his gun barrel a trifle. "Well, when you goin' to try somethin' else?"

"Go on, take a chance, Sonora," Quirt Roberts urged in ugly tones. "Them birds won't dare shoot us—"

Thwack! A leaden slug ripped into the floor midway between Pierce and Roberts. Through the smoke from the muzzle of Stony's gun the two men could see that his face had suddenly gone grim. "That's just a starter," Stony snapped. "If you two coyotes want to finish it, come on and draw. I'm waitin' for you!"

"And my first shot is goin' to tear plumb through Blackwood's bread-basket." Tuscon supplemented, his voice like chilled steel.

Once again the gunmen settled down, but Tuscon felt it couldn't be for long. Regardless of the position of their chief, the four men might take things into their own hands at any minute. From then on there was little talk. The two cowboys were too busily engaged in keeping a close watch on their opponents.

The minutes dragged slowly. Tuscon was getting anxious, now. He knew he couldn't hold the crowd much longer, if the gunmen continued to behave belligerently. Even McCoy, the coolest of the four, and the one with the greatest experience, was commencing to grow restive.

Hands on top of his head, he shifted his feet uneasily. After a man has held his hands in the air for a long time he is more than likely to take any chance to get them down near his waist.

Suddenly, wild cheering burst from the direction of the polls. Tuscon glanced at an old clock on the wall and saw that the hands pointed to ten after midnight. "The count's finished," he surmised aloud.

A minute later Terry Kellicut burst into the Española Palace, his face beaming. "You done it, Tuscon," he yelled. "I don't know how I'll ever thank you."

"Never mind what I done," Tuscon spoke out of the corner of his mouth, as he kept both eyes on the Blackwood faction. "Let's have the figures, Terry."

For answer Kellicut held aloft a square of tin upon which was smeared in fresh paint the final count:

Kellicut .....601 votes
Blackwood .....453 votes

"Wow!" Stony yelled his exultation, leaping in the air and kicking his heels together. "Blackwood has got to buy the drinks for the new sheriff!"

CHAPTER XVI

Tuscon Goes Down

TUSCON had risked only a brief glance at the figures, but Stony's exuberance of spirits had given two of the gunmen the chance they sought: the hands of Quirt Roberts and Sonora Pierce flashed down to holsters! Luckily their arms were a trifle cramped and they got into action slower than was their wont.

Tuscon saw the move coming. Swinging his right gun he clipped Blackwood smartly alongside the head with the heavy barrel. Blackwood went sprawling to the floor. At the same instant a bullet cut through the handkerchief at Tuscon's neck. Two more slugs had whistled dangerously close to Stony. Cursing himself for his carelessness, Stony commenced thumbing hammers!

Flaming streams of lead and smoke jetted from the guns in the hands of the two cowboys. Robert's feet suddenly left the floor as he jerked convulsively to one side, and a wild pain-wrenched scream was torn from his lips.

Sonora Pierce was down now, too, with

a broken thigh-bone. But Sonora wasn't quitting. Back leaning against the bar, he sent shot after shot winging across the room. Tuscon jerked one gun in Pierce's direction . . . fired! The man went abruptly rigid, his gun arm stiffened, then the weapon dropped from his nerveless fingers. For just a moment he remained upright, then slowly toppled on his side.

The other gunmen still held their hands in the air. It wasn't that they lacked nerve, but they knew when to chance a draw, and when not to. Only Behr grew reckless. He paused just a trifle too long before he drew his gun. By the time it was half out, Kellicut had pulled . . . fired from the hip . . . and sent a lead slug crashing into Behr's right shoulder. Behr was whirled off his feet as though he had been struck with a sledge-hammer. He went crashing down.

Tuscon was wild for battle now. "C'mon, you skunks!" he yelled invitingly. "If you got any more lead to trade, get busy! We're waitin'!"

He stood there, shrouded by the drifting powder smoke, his knees slightly bent, head well down in his shoulders, elbows close to ribs, gray spirals curling upward from the twin gun muzzles, a veritable fighting machine. His replica was to be found in Stony, crouched a few short yards away. At their feet lay Hawk Blackwood, just regaining consciousness.

At that moment, with a wild yell of triumph, Kellicut's cowpunchers, headed by Sleepy Hatch and Stephen Stinson, burst into the room.

"We got enough!" Ghost McCoy called. Again his hands were well above his head.

A sigh of disappointment left Tuscon's lips. He and Stony straightened up.

Kellicut took charge of the situation and in a short time order was restored. Some one threw a pail of water on Hawk Blackwood and he struggled sullenly erect. Grizzly Behr was on his feet, now, but clutching his wounded shoulder and groaning with pain. At Kellicut's order, several of the crowd, glad of an opportunity to get outside, stepped forward and removed the dead bodies of Sonora Pierce and Quirt Roberts. A few minutes later Kellicut ordered the remainder of the crowd out of the Española, allowing only Blackwood and his henchmen to remain.

"Get everythin' finished okay, Stephen?" Terry asked Stinson.

The old man nodded, smiled. "Everythin' was fine. We had Mandell recount the votes just to make sure there wasn't no mistake, then we made him sign a paper to the effect that the election was carried off in a square manner. His signature on the count will stop any arguments that Blackwood might try to put up."

"That's fine," Terry nodded. He lined Blackwood, Lyons, Behr, McCoy and Ferguson up before him, then, "Blackwood," he stated firmly, "you've lost the election. That I've managed to win is no credit to me. I owe my election to Tuscon Smith, who had the guts to fight on, even when I was figurin' to lose. It's taught me a lesson, and I'm goin' to show Cuarta City things can't go on this way."

"Aw, cut the chatter," Blackwood interposed sullenly. "What you holdin' us here for? You can't do nothin' to us."

"Mebbe I could, mebbe I couldn't," Kellicut returned grimly. "I ain't been sworn in yet, but I'm speakin' with the authority of sheriff, just the same. I'm promisin' to give you one chance to go straight. You've got a ranch, and property in Cuarta City; regardless of how you got hold of this property, I'm respectin' your rights in the matter. With what you own you could earn an honest livin'. See if you can't do it. Another thing: the Española Palace and Warbonnet Saloon has got pretty tough reputations. At the first bum move I'll close 'em both up. In givin' you your chance, I'm advisin' that you take advantage of it!"

"By gosh," Stony muttered. "That's more than most fellers would do for Blackwood. I'd be in favor of holdin' a necktie party for Hawk."

Kellicut next turned his attention to Laramie Lyons: "Lyons, I've decided we don't need a marshal here. I'll keep the law in Cuarta City myself. So, Laramie, you better hand in your resignation to Judge Mandell. It may interest you a heap to know that Mandell is goin' to

work with me from now on. He don't know that yet, but when he gets his choice of movin' out or livin' accordin' to law, I reckon he won't take long to decide."

Lyons nodded, pale-lipped.

"You fellers can get out, now," Kellicut finished. "Better get Behr to a doctor before he bleeds to death. He ain't hurt bad, but I can see he's gettin' weak."

"We don't have to get out," Blackwood declared defiantly. "This is my place!"

Terry turned a level-eyed gaze on the man. "Oh, don't you?" he asked quietly. Then, "I'm buyin' my friends a drink on the election, Blackwood. *Buyin'!* Do you hear that? One of your bartenders can take care of us, so you don't need to stay. I don't like to drink when there's skunks around, anyhow."

"By Gawd!" Blackwood thundered, "I'll—" That was as far as he got. His eyes dropped before Terry's steady gaze, then he muttered, "All right, we'll go. But you ain't heard the last of this."

"I hope not," Terry returned coldly.

Blackwood strode furiously to the door. Behind him trailed Behr, Ferguson, McCoy, and Lyons, Behr leaning heavily on Lyons' supporting arm. Without a word the five men passed out into the street.

"You should have put 'em in jail," Stony murmured. "They'll just go out to the Bar X 8 and cook up more deviltry."

"Will that make you mad, cowboy?" Tuscon grinned.

"Not none!" Stony laughed back. "Me, I'm lookin' for some *real* excitement."

Drinks were ordered and downed, then Kellicut commenced to eulogize Tuscon. "I tell you, fellows," Terry stated warmly. "Tuscon is the man that should be sheriff, not me. He used his head, even if he did buy votes with bandannas and jewelry—"

"Shucks!" Tuscon protested, red-faced, "I didn't do nothin'. I didn't buy no votes, neither. That reminds me, though, I oughta get busy passin' out them presents.'

Glad of an opportunity to escape Kellicut's praise he turned toward the door, adding, "Guess I'll do it right to once. I'll be takin' your horse, Stony. Mine's at the Slash S, y'know. This may take a little time, but I'll get back soon as I can."

At his hut in the Mexican Quarter, Tuscon found the street filled with Mexicans awaiting his arrival. He was forced to dismount some distance away, and thread his way through the crowd among several cries of *"Viva Elección!"* and *"Viva Señor Kellicut!"* There were also several who called *vivas* for the Americano. They had by this time learned that Tuscon was a white man, but he was dealing squarely with them; that was all that mattered.

Five minutes later Tuscon was distributing the presents to the Mexicans, who at once departed for their homes to prove to their families that all gringos were not cheats. In a short time his canvas bundle had entirely disappeared, and Tuscon commenced to deal out money to the remaining few for whom there were no gifts. . . .

Finally, it was over. The last Mexican had departed for his home, and darkness settled over the Quarter. Tuscon found he was very tired, now. After all, it had been a strain keeping up the pretense of being a Mexican. And yet, despite the fact that his money was practically gone, there was considerable recompense in the smiles he had brought to the faces of his neighbors. Even Tuscon's two goats were gone, having been presented to a man who was anxious to become Tuscon's father-in-law—still was, in fact, even though he now knew that Tuscon was a gringo. After all, the Mexicans were very much like children. It took only the merest bauble to make them happy.

"Yep, they're just like kids," Tuscon mused, as he started to leave his hut. "Today was like a Christmas for 'em. They ain't bad hombres, neither, when you know 'em. Pretty much like anybody else."

He passed through the door, stepped into the narrow winding street, then bent his steps toward his horse.

At that moment he heard a noise behind him—there came a rush of hurried steps. Tuscon's hand flashed to holster, but before he could draw, a heavy gun barrel had descended with crushing force on his defenseless head. The stars swirled dizzily in the heavens, then everything went black as Tuscon crashed to the ground!

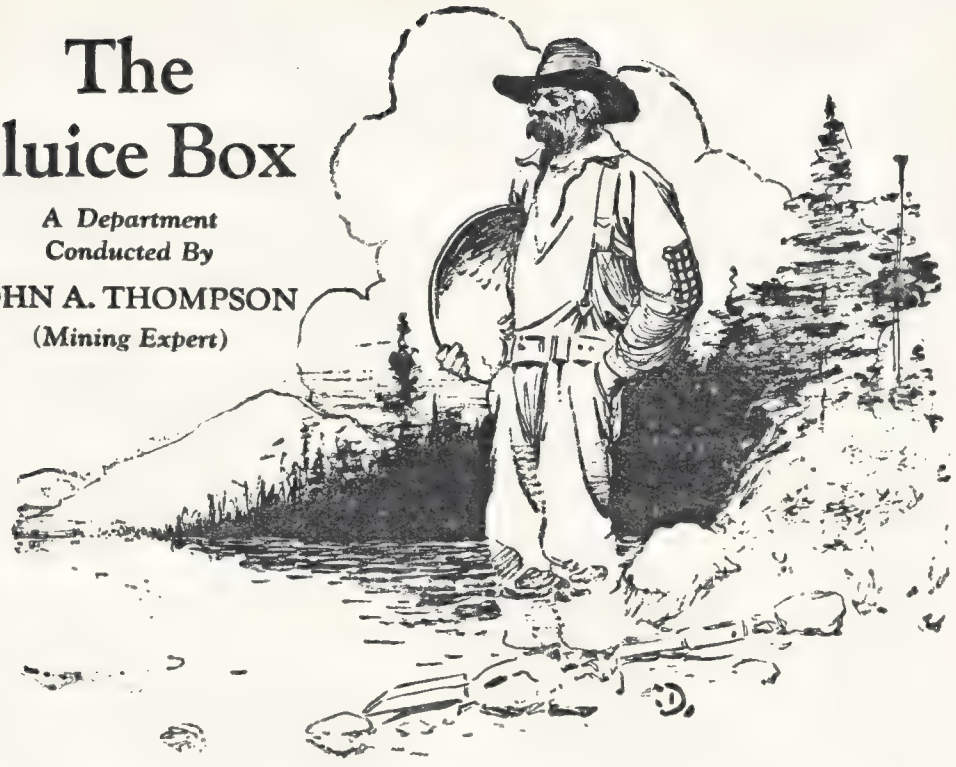
(*To be continued in the next issue.*)

The Sluice Box

A Department Conducted By

JOHN A. THOMPSON

(Mining Expert)



THIS department is intended to be of real interest and practical assistance to all readers of ACE-HIGH MAGAZINE. It is conducted by the well-known John A. Thompson, mining expert. In it each issue will be published some interesting facts concerning the various phases of prospecting and mining, based on John A. Thompson's many years of actual experience in the West and in Alaska. Prospecting problems and procedure will be discussed regularly. Also, questions relating to mining laws, field conditions, new and old mining territories, and so forth, will be answered in this department. If you wish a personal answer, enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope with your question. Address all questions to John A. Thompson, Mining Expert, care of ACE-HIGH MAGAZINE, 80 Lafayette St., New York, N. Y.

No. 14 Flowing Gold

FINDING oil has all the thrills of hunting for gold—and then some. It is a bigger gamble. The actual drilling is packed with tense, dramatic moments. And the rewards of bringing in a good gusher may mean lifelong independence.

Prospecting for oil is a specialty—something that is, as a rule, beyond the scope of the average prospector in search of minerals.

The generally accepted theory of the origin of oil, the type of formations in which it occurs, as well as the methods of testing for oil, all predicate a procedure very different from that usually followed in the hunt for metals or the metalliferous ores. The equipment required is different. And, what is perhaps more important, the financial outlay involved in sinking one drill hole would grubstake the average desert rat for ten years.

As to the origin of oil under the ground—it is generally believed that great quantities of plant life and animal remains were buried back in prehistoric times in certain sedimentary rock formations, such as some of the shales and limestones. Lying there in the primal ooze, decomposition set in, and the oil under the pressure of overlying rock strata seeped into the more porous rocks. The rumpling and

folding of the earth's crust twisted and bent these porous rocks, and the oil gathered where it could in vast underground storage areas. Thus were formed the rich oil fields, holding millions of dollars in hidden wealth for whoever should discover them and release their countless barrels of "flowing gold."

Like other minerals, oil frequently advertises its presence by various surface indications, which are signals to the vigilant prospector that a fortune may lie within his grasp.

Oil seepage is the most obvious and most important sign that should be looked for. There is an old adage among oil prospectors that "many indications are good, but none quite as good as a little of the oil itself."

"Gas blows," accumulations of natural asphaltum, and associated substances, are also good evidences of possible oil deposits.

In connection with these surface signs, the optimist must be careful not to mistake the thin film of vegetable oil that sometimes gathers about the edge of pools, or along the shores of brooks, for a real seepage. Marsh gas, commonly found where masses of vegetation have been covered with sediment, is another false scent not to be confused with a genuine "gas blow." Air bubbles filtering up through soggy ground are also often mistaken for "gas." The odoriferous sulphur gas found occasionally in conjunction with a deposit of iron pyrites is still another pitfall which the wary must avoid.

If these false indications are tracked down and detected as such early enough, a lot of time, money and wear and tear on the emotions may be saved later.

In prospecting for oil, additional surface evidence should be looked for in the exposed outcrops of the neighborhood, and by a study of the local rock formations. Again, the oil prospector hits a difficulty. The mineral hunter has the hope of finding traces, and even sizable showings of metal in an outcrop. This gives him something to bank on—a definite encouragement; an invitation to proceed.

With oil things are different. Nothing can be told positively one way or the other until a bore hole has been sunk and the suspected formation tapped. And drilling oil wells is a costly habit to get into.

It takes an expert to drill for oil intelligently. Experts are in demand. And they are an expensive adjunct to prospecting. One reason why these trained men are essential is that even the discovery of an incontrovertibly genuine oil seep is not an infallible marker as to the proper spot to sink a well. Inexperience might prompt one to drill directly over the seepage, whereas someone initiated into the mysteries of the business could have pointed out that the seep was on the wrong side of the anticline. Due to a fold in the rock strata the oil reservoir may be on the other side of the hill, or across the gully, or somewhere else where the oil seep isn't.

Knowledge of the underground formations as well as the surface showing is essential in oil drilling.

Broadly speaking the most favorable areas for oil are regions of slightly tilted or inclined layers of sedimentary rocks. The slope, whether on the surface or under the ground, provides a flow through the porous rock and affords the oil a means of collecting in natural subterranean reservoirs.

According to R. E. Collom of the United States Bureau of Mines, oil field formations may be divided roughly into four general classes: reservoir rocks, barrier rocks, marker rocks and indicator rocks.

Reservoir formations are the porous, creviced, or cavernous rock strata into which the oil seeps and is retained. They are chiefly sandstone, limestone and shale. In the fields of Ohio, Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Oklahoma, sandstone is the common reservoir rock.

Shale, a compact, fine-grained mud or clay from which the moisture has been expelled by the internal pressure of the earth, sometimes fractures under the stress of subterranean movements, and forms an oil reservoir. At other times it acts as a barrier rock.

One of the first requirements for an oil accumulation is a reservoir surrounded

more or less by an impervious rock envelope. These impervious formations prevent the escape of the oil and are known as barrier rocks. They are one of the essential things to be considered in oil prospecting and are composed for the most part of shale, clay, slate, compact limestone or even quartzite.

Marker rocks derive their name from the fact that because of certain peculiarities in their texture, or some other distinguishing characteristic, they are easily identifiable and so adapt themselves as key formations in an oil field. They are essentially position markers. When the driller reaches them he can estimate his probable distance to oil, the kind of rock yet to be encountered and so forth. And he works out his drilling problems accordingly.

The importance of marker rocks depends largely on the wide extent of the formation and the geological structure of the region in which they occur. Prominent examples of markers are the famous Greenbried limestones in Ohio, the Oswego limes of the Kansas and Oklahoma fields, and the Coalinga red rock found in conjunction with the East Side oil fields of California.

"Indicators" may be found either at or below the surface. They include deposits of sulphur, salt and coal. All are found in proximity to oil at times. Huge deposits of salt underlie the Texas and Louisiana oil regions. In some of the Texas fields salt domes form a core about which the oil has accumulated. Incidentally salt water almost always accompanies deposits of oil and gas.

Just one more tip. It is best to prospect for oil seeps in the warm weather. Then the oil flows more freely, and is more apt to steal through its containing rock than when the temperature is low and the oil thick and sluggish.

However, even oil seeps are not always necessary. Most of the development of the great mid-continent oil fields is said to have been carried by drilling and a study of the underground formations exclusively, and without the help of any of the common surface signs of oil.

1—(*a*) *My question may be a little "off the trail," but I understand that the lowest land in the United States is in Death Valley, and would like to know if that is correct.* (*b*) *If so, how low is it?* (*c*) *If not, where is the lowest land in the United States? Everett Webster, Washington, D. C.*

Ans. (a) Correct. The lowest land in the United States—and I believe in America—is found in Death Valley, down in Lower California. (b) It is 276 feet below sea level there.

2—(*a*) *Is there any gold in Nova Scotia? Harry Willis, Pittsfield, Massachusetts.*

Ans. (a) There is. And only recently there has been a boom in gold mining activity there. According to C. Price-Green, Commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources of the Canadian National Railways, the gold-bearing rocks of Nova Scotia form a belt varying in width from ten miles at the eastern end to seventy-five at the western extremity, and extending some two hundred seventy-five miles in length along the Atlantic Coast from Canso to Yarmouth. The area, containing some 6,000 square miles, is underlain by what has been termed the "true gold-bearing series." This area embraces the counties of Guysboro, Halifax, Colchester, Lunenberg, Queens and Yarmouth. It has produced gold to the extent of over nineteen million dollars in value, with an average of approximately $8.70 a ton.

Regarding the recent revival of gold mining activity, the Hon. G. S. Harrington, Minister of Public Works and Mines for Nova Scotia is quoted in the "Halifax Herald" as saying, "The eastern half of the mainland of the province is one great area of gold-bearing rocks with associated volcanic intrusions. . . . Gold was discovered about 1865 and for the next forty years a large number of successful mines were opened and worked. . . . New laws along modern lines were passed recently and the effect has been immediate. . . . Individual enterprise has suddenly come to life again. There has been a sharp revival in gold mining."

There you are, Willis. Go to Nova Sco-

tia if you want to tackle something out of the ordinary in gold prospecting—something away from the usual trends towards the north and west.

3—(a) *When was gold discovered in the Bradshaw Mountains, Arizona? Frank Lindsay, Waterloo, Iowa.*

Ans. (a) As early as 1863 gold-hunting placer miners from the California fields wandered down into the semi-desert region at the foot of the Bradshaw Mountains and discovered valuable gold deposits on Lynx Creek and the Hassayampa River. Development was hindered by hostile Indians, lack of transportation facilities and the fact that the gravels as compared with the fabuously rich California ground were not thought worth working by the old-timers. It wasn't until twelve years later that rich silver and gold mines were located, and with the beginning of lode mining in earnest, the district's history actually began.

4—(a) *Can you tell me about how much feldspar is mined in the United States, and where most of it comes from? (b) Also what is an average price for a ton of feldspar? Albert Constantine, Holland, Michigan.*

Ans. (a) According to recent figures supplied to the United States Bureau of Mines crude feldspar production in the United States runs a bit over 200,000 long tons annually. Its value is estimated at about a million and a half dollars. Over ninety per cent of the output comes from the Atlantic Seaboard States ranging from Maine to North Carolina, the latter producing about fifty per cent of the annual output. Other producing States are Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Maryland, New Hampshire, New York, Pennsylvania, South Dakota and Virginia.

(b) The average value of a long ton of crude feldspar is between six and seven dollars.

5—(a) *Are they still dredging for gold in the placer fields of the Nome district in Alaska, or are the gold-bearing grounds completely worked out by now? E. P. Lenihan, Shreveport, Louisiana.*

Ans. (a) Dredging around Nome was reported as more active last summer season than it had been for some time previously, no less than twelve gold dredgers being said to have been employed in the district. While the spectacularly rich deposits have probably been pretty thoroughly worked out, there seems to be still plenty of property that can be made to pay by modern mining methods and intelligent operation.

Nome is still on the map as a big gold producer—and very likely will be for some time to come.

Do You Know Your SLUICE BOX?

1—What is meant by "float" rock?

2—The molten material that pours out from volcanoes is known as. . . ?

3—Does a vein always carry payable ore?

4—Are nuggets of metal other than gold ever found by a prospector?

5—What is a "pay-shoot"?

(*The answers to these questions will be printed in the next issue of* ACE-HIGH.)

Answers to Questions in First December Issue.

1—A piece of gold is almost twice as heavy as a piece of lead of the same size. 2—A cubic foot of solid gold would weigh approximately twelve hundred six and a quarter pounds. 3—Black diamonds are used commercially in diamond drills. 4—Because of their extreme hardness. 5—Mexico was once said to rank first in the world's production of silver.

Vast mineral treasure may lie beneath the surface of some shallow sea—under the lakes in northern Canada—or along a river bottom too deep for ordinary prospecting. Hunting underwater ore deposits will be the subject of The Sluice Box in the next issue of ACE-HIGH. Don't miss your copy.

John A. Thompson

A GET-TOGETHER DEPARTMENT FOR GENERAL SERVICE TO OUR READERS

Conducted by The Storekeeper

THE BARGAIN COUNTER

If you want to exchange something you have, but don't want, for something you want that someone else has, here is the place to do it. It must be understood that ACE-HIGH *cannot be held responsible for losses sustained by our readers.*

Announcements inserted free of charge, but they must not exceed 21 words inclusive of name and address, and must be either typed or hand-printed. Nothing but BONA FIDE trades acceptable; announcements of articles for sale will be ignored. State both what you have and what you want. Study samples of announcements in this issue for the proper way to draft yours.

The United States Government prohibits mailing of firearms capable of being concealed on the person, therefore, swaps of revolvers, pistols, etc., will not be published in "The Bargain Counter."

Have Indian motorcycle parts, accordion, magazines. Want quadruple multiplying reel, traps, rifle. Floyd E. Hayner, 29 Green St., Webster, Mass.

Have 20 U. S., 40 foreign coins, .22 blank pistol, .12-ga., books, magazines, or? Want motor bike, light motorcycle, or? Harlan Gates, Wellsville, N. Y.

Want cactus plants from desert. What is wanted? All letters answered. E. M. Anderson, San Lorenzo, Calif.

Have chemical set, Daisy air-rifle, tent, scientific books. Want bicycle motor, pet monkey, .22 repeating rifle. Bill Ardinger, 1036 New St., Bethlehem, Pa.

Have United Y. M. C. A. "Advertising" course, Instant-freeze, makes frozen deserts in 30 seconds. What have you? Thomas Gilmore, 860 Longwood Ave., Boston, Mass.

Want printing outfit and fancy used guns. Have fancy saddle and horse gear, Corona, 5-tube radio. B. P. Kunkler, Winslow, Wash.

Have typewriter, phonograph, razors, opera glasses, etc. Want radio, or? A. Sheppard, Box 1118, Detroit, Mich.

Want Francis Zavier Martin "History of N. C." 2 vols., also John Lawson "History of N. C.," or any old book. Dorris Tate, Box 463, Forest City, N. C.

U. S. or foreign stamps for old dime novels or books of the West, old or new. G. P. Co., Danielson, Conn.

Have radio magazines and government bulletins, folding drawing board stand. What have you? Send list. James Morris, 2017 Courtland St., Houston, Texas.

Have fly-rod, reel and line, Remington portable typewriter, Mah Jong set, tenor banjo, etc. Want high-grade tackle. E. H. Roland, 2156 Berteau Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Have 6-v. generator, ½ h.p. motor, 35 fiction books, banjo-uke, cylinder record phonograph. Want radio goods, or? All letters answered. Elmo Polk, Greenville, Mo.

Tear this slip off and mail it with your announcement—it entitles you to one *free* insertion in this Department. Announcements are limited to 21 words—trades only—no others considered. Announcements must be either typed or hand-printed.

Name .....

Street .....

City .....

(Void after December 21, 1928.)

Have typewriter, binoculars, old magazines, papers, books, pipes, etc., for old books, guns, antiques. J. H. Sudbeck, 4610 N. 20th St., St. Louis, Mo.

Want squirrel dog, silent. Have magazines, books, relics and other trades. Trade anything. M. E. Clemmer, Smithfield, Pa.

Have pair beaded Indian moccasins, opera glasses, fountain pen, wrist watch. What have you? D. Ward, 1012 Conway St., St. Paul, Minn.

Have house on White River, ideal location for hunting, fishing and trapping. Want car. W. W. Shively, Crocketts Bluff, Ark.

Have oxy-acetylene torch, tips new, 6 cutting and 11 welding tips, 2 pair goggles. Want guns, or? P. J. Strebl, 344 Grand Blvd., Brookfield, Ill.

Relics of natives, South Sea Islands. Want good Civil War relics such as musket, bayonet, cap, etc. Write. What have you? W. W. Kanel, 858 N. Chester Ave., Pasadena, Calif.

Want guinea pigs, rabbits, poultry, opals, cartoonist course, list of 150 articles to trade. Write. Big Jess, 4115 Concordia Ave., St. Louis, Mo.

Will exchange one cloth-bound fiction book for 20 post card views of your city. Satisfaction guaranteed. Send on. H. D. Britt, Arco, Ga.

Have Burrow's pool table, 3 x 5. What have you? H. J. Wood, Whately, Mass.

Want small Crosley radios, parts, audio, transformers, etc. Have 1900-ft. film, "The Teacher," and other good trades. Herman Zachry, Lockesburg, Ark.

Want Neon tube, also small AC motor. Have all kinds radio parts and other things. Write. Wayne Storch, Beecher, Ill.

Have Radiola, suitcase set, ¼-h.p. DC motor, old U. S. medals, set Curwood books, officer's scabbard. What have you? A. Manheimer, 16651 Monica Ave., Detroit, Mich.

Want outboard engine. What do you want? Ben Czyewski, 170 W. 20th St., Bayonne, N. J.

Trade 10 post card views for United certificates. James Chrastka, 2725 So. Springfield Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Have brand-new violin with bow, rosin and case. Want repeating rifle, or? Julius Borst, 420 Grand St., New York City.

Have butterfly instruction book, set of Chadman's cyclopedia of law, 200 magazines, books, Ever-Ready razor. What have you? Vernon A. Spears, Lamar, S. C.

Have motion picture camera for taking moving pictures. Want small projector and film. Frank L. Pennington, Vernon, Texas.

Have riding bridle and holster and .38 cartridge belt. Want 3- or 4-tube radio with batteries or set alone. Bernard D. Williams, 1026 N. W. 6th Ave., Miami, Fla.

Will trade 50 stamps for large cents, 75 for half-dimes, 100 for 3c-silver piece. Randle Folk, 214 South St., Mt. Airy, N. C.

Have 100 Spalding and Dunlop golf balls, good as new. Want stamps. A. A. Delmore, St. Bruno, Chambly Co., Quebec, Canada.

Have biascope, 8-in. dagger. Want coins or arrowheads. E. R. Akely, Little Valley, N. Y.

Have Crosley AC radio to trade for anything of equal value. Elmer Suthers, Tama, Iowa.

Want Indian relics, curios, prehistoric Stone Age pieces, old books on Indians and pioneer days. Send for offer. Anything in exchange. Albert Heath, Harbor Springs, Mich.

Get my list if you have a good violin, diamond, travel magazines, office supplies or anything else worth while. Adam Quenzer, 315 Barbey St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Have 75-lb. barbell plates. What have you? Want barbell and Milo courses. What do you want? H. J. Kosinski, 5808 W. 26th St., Cicero, Ill.

Want old coins. Will trade a book on hypnotism and black art for 5 coins. Zelda Hamaday, 7545 Linwood, Detroit, Mich.

Have radio, .25-20 and .22 rifle, Conn cornet, old coins, etc. Want camera, books, phonograph, field glasses. E. L. Chapman, R. 3, Harrisonburg, Va.

Have violin lessons. What have you? Lydia Schneider, 436½ Sheridan Rd., Menominee, Mich.

Swap stamps. For each 100 different foreign common stamps sent me, I will return same amount. Let's go. Richard Golden, 1926 Haworth St., Philadelphia, Pa.

Trade auto mechanic books, watch, guns, magazines, books, fishing tackles, camp cot. Want anything. Dan Gray, Dayhoit, Ky.

Have guns, cornet, etc. Want typewriter, World War books, uniform, etc. E. L. Chapman, R. 3, Harrisonburg, Va. .

Have 2 dozen boys' raincoats to trade for guns or useful articles. Leon Achuff, 257 Water St., Paterson, N. J.

Have electrical earphone for the hard of hearing, new. Want guns, typewriter, or? R. Ward, 991 Pacific St., St. Paul, Minn.

Exchange instructions "How To Make Envelopes For 5c A Thousand" for 100 stamps. E. Queeney, Gloversville, N. Y.

Will trade old muzzle-loading shotgun, old coins, books and magazines and .12-ga. shotgun for high-powered Winchester rifle. William Phelps, Jr., R. F. D. 4, Ellicot City, Md.

Want air-pistol. Have powerful telescope, fishing rod, football, old coins, 'most everything. Walter J. Malone, 22 Grove St., Mt. Vernon, N. Y.

Thousands of stamps wanted. Send for my offer. Am teacher. Have many things. A swap value on your stamps would help. Edward Lockwood, Box 264, F. P. Sta., Springfield, Mass.

Have small diamond and pearl stickpin, 17-J Elgin watch, perfect. Want .12-ga. pump gun. M. Hetzel, 4145 W. 21st Pl., Chicago, Ill.

Have leather aviator's coat, size 38, Kodak and case, fly-rod for hunting coat, good shotgun, or? Box 332, Sumas, Wash.

Have old records, radio loud speaker, earphones, and? Want canary, singer, German police pup. What do you want? Kathryn Schmidt, 2900 Reading Rd., Cincinnati, Ohio.

Have height increasing course, Liederman's course, magic books, card tricks, U. S. coins, etc. Want U. S. coins or anything useful. M. Sockernoski, 1535—7th St., Bethlehem, Pa.

Edison victrola and records, Normandy chime clock, mandolin, electric parlor lamp, etc. Want old violins, banjos, concert guitar. J. A. Riess, R. 3, So. Church St., Waynesboro, Pa.

Have one-year-old registered Irish setter, female, with papers. Want high-top shoes, size 7, coon or hunting coat. William C. Anthony, Freeport, Pa.

Is your watch on the bum? Do you need a good one? I'll trade with you. John Anderson, Karlstad, Minn.

Beautiful beadwork garters, bags, etc., photos, books, papers, foreign magazines, all kinds, for what? W. F. Gebhardt, 3107 S. Clinton St., Ft. Wayne, Ind.

Have cartridge belt, 35 Western and Ace-High magazines, 1500 stamps in album, air-rifle. Want Civil War rifles and revolvers. Robert Howell, 77 Grace Church St., Rye, N. Y.

Want drawing books, typewriter, radio. Have books, stamps, conservatory instrument. Exchange lists. John Jacob, 510 E. Jersey St., Elizabeth, N. J.

Want any kind of short story course or "The Market Guide Book" for story writers or similar books. What do you want? Biagio Tesa, 301 E. 115th St., New York, N. Y.

Mahogany electric alarm clock, large movie camera, speed Kodak, modern, antique firearms, hydraulic auto jack, medals. V. J. McMurtry, 4133 Kenmore Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Want vest-pocket Kodak with fast lens. Have photographic apparatus, Boy Scout packsack, latest issue, etc. W. M. Mullins, 608 Pollock St., Richmond, Va.

Have one Stradivarius violin and 2 guns. Want Fordson belt or guns. O. E. Log, Blackstone, Ill.

25 acres unimproved beach land on east coast of Florida. Trade for small improved property West Cascade Range, clear title. Box 56, Bonita Springs, Fla.

Want tattoo designs and stencils, also .22-ga. single, or? Have radio parts and tools. J. H. George, 5241 Natrona Way, Arsenal Sta., Pittsburgh, Pa.

Have complete course in dressmaking and millinery. Want good phonograph records, orthophonic preferred. Mrs. G. O. Miller, Box 46, Holbrook, Ariz.

Have fancy pigeons, 5-tube radio, chemistry set, plate Kodak, German marks and coupons. Trade for ducks, pets, dogs, guns, etc. Clifford Dorchester, 311 So. Meadow St., Watertown, N. Y.

Have 2 gray foxes, 1 bull pup, 5 months old, shepherd 4½ years. Your list for mine. Albert McIntosh, Domino, Ky.

Want old U. S. coins, bills, Confederate bills, coins, or? Write for my list. J. W. Smith 2520 Ave. "G," Ensley, Ala.

Want .16- or .20-ga. pump gun, or? Have Waltham 11-j. watch, Chinese geese, pigs, hounds, etc. B. U. Fanning, R. 4, Lamar, Mo.

Electrical engineering course, Waltham railroad watch, hand made Indian knife. Want radio, guns, lands, etc. O. M. Culkough, Gov. Savings Office, Queen's Park, Toronto, Canada.

Have Western books. Want "Roping" by Chester Byers, "Juggling A Rope," by Charles Coe. H. A. Discher, R. 2, Shiner, Texas.

Have stamps you want for your duplicates. Helfers, 3615 Piedmont Ave., Oakland, Calif.

Regular cowboy's roping lariats to trade for flintlock, cap and ball, or other old guns. Write me what you have. Carl E. Freeman, Box 326, Carrizozo, N. M.

Old almanacs, date 1850 up to 1880. Want anything. B. C. Campbell, Tullahoma, Tenn.

Have old violin. What have you? S. P. Champ, Hopemont, W. Va.

Cartoons drawn of yourself from photo in trade for anything of equal value. Send photo and state hobby. Dwight B. Roberts, General Delivery, Mullan, Idaho.

Have 1930 Indian standard motorcycle, .12-ga. single-shot shotgun. Want short-wave receiver and transmitter, or light motorcycle. Edward Berberich, 4427 Minnesota, St. Louis, Mo.

Have "How To Collect Delinquent Accounts By Mail." Want journalism or short-story course or books. W. Schwartz, 2701 Allen Ave., St. Louis, Mo.

Want good wrist watch and parrot. Have moving picture film, movie star photos, books. Trade lists. Rowland Reisinger, Mount Washington, Baltimore, Md.

Want .45 cartridge belt, spurs, other cowboy equipment. What do you want? Also want traps. E. Cutting, Marilla, N. Y.

Want multigraph machine. Have new records, Ithaca double hammerless, new auto accessories, etc. Write quickly. G. W. Reeve, Box 13, Nettleton, Ark.

Radio, motiograph projector, Remington typewriter, Hawkins' electrical guides, Hot-point iron, etc. Want electric goods, radio, or? D. Lanter, Willow Hill, Ill.

Have typewriter to trade for firearms. I. W. Randall, 155 W. Main St., Rochester, N. Y.

Will trade any cotton-mouth or water moccasins for any rattlesnake or other poisonous snake. Herbert Nicholson, 4025 Magazine St., New Orleans, La.

Have radios, parts, headphones, and 5 good speakers. Want A- or B-eliminator, set testing outfit, Power speaker, short-wave receiver, etc. J. F. Talley, 346 Chestnut St., Rockhill, S. C.

Have books, snare drum and Gilbert chemistry set to exchange for dancing course. Ralph Schuster, 244 Atlantic Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Residence in Clinton, Mo., and Florida acreage, trade for good job printing outfit in good condition. Describe fully. A. L. Neuenschwander, 1239 N. W. 22nd Ave., Miami, Fla.

Have Titus course and exerciser, electric accessories, tools, lots of other things. Want tattoo outfit. Jack Taylor, 2006—43rd St., Kenosha, Wisc.

Want live mink, red foxes, good mink dog. Have banjo, shotgun, trail hounds, bronze turkeys, silver foxes, cross foxes, karakul sheep. C. Orsen, Colgate, N. D.

Have excellent haversack, good records, cloth-covered fiction and educational. Want .22 rifle. All letters answered. J. Porda, 35 Pardee St., Bristol, Conn.

Have "Cowboy Life on Western Plains," "Story of the Wild West." Want good lariat. H. A. Discher, R. 2, Shiner, Texas.

Want stamps, coins, albums and also stamp collections. Have large list, including almost everything you want. George Kessler, Jr., 479 Palisade Ave., Garfield, N. J.

Will give instruction and criticism in drawing and figure construction. Want old books, coins, magazines, or? Atelier Ascalcon, 6720 So. Ashland Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Have thousands of stamps and all sorts of magazines. Want 1927 Scott's stamp catalog. Send catalog and name the stamps. Frank Seward, 7521—62nd Pl., Argo, Ill.

Want lot near New York. Have very rare papers and books. Frank Howlett, 130 W. 90th St., New York City.

Have magazines, stamps, trench helmet, aviator's helmet, drawing set, etc. Want boxing gloves, typewriter, stamps, or? P. W. Hanson, 21 Fallbrook St., Portland, Me.

Want post cards from all states and foreign countries. Will exchange. S. Betzold, 1917 Price St., Scranton, Pa.

Have large ladies' fur and violin. Want camp tent, or? J. D. Arnold, Judsonia, Ark.

Have large Indian relics. To get acquainted, send 15 arrows and receive 15 Minn. arrows or tomahawk. E. F. Carlson, R. 4, Box 115, Little Falls, Minn.

Have violin and small microscope. Want A. C. radio voltmeter, preferably low range. Also have Credenza phonograph, for? J. D. Hughes, R. 1, Box 777, Compton, Calif.

Have 3 h. p. A. C. motor, new ¼-h. p. D. C., 30 motion picture reels. Want typewriter, motion picture machine head or guns. J. Foote, Shoals, Ind.

Want Great Dane pup or Russian wolfhound pup. What do you want? John Confrey, 931 Lakeside Pl., Chicago, Ill.

Have English saddle, lariat, quirt, dagger, bit, player rolls, punching bag, etc. Want saddle bags, shoe skates, beans or hunting boots. Ray M. Haugen, Forest City, Ia.

Have 3-tube radio, razors, guns, Westinghouse motor. Want tattoo outfit, typewriter, etc. No stamps wanted. Albert Haught, R. 1, Hickory, Pa.

Rare old U. S. coins to trade for old U. S. and Colonial coppers. Send list. M. E. Brown, 2951 Lycaste Ave., Detroit, Mich.

Will exchange radio parts, stiff back books, Bett's Zane memorial pictures and post cards, for flowers, seeds, bulbs and cactus plants. Mrs. G. M. S., Box 335, Martin's Ferry, Ohio.

Ferrets, books, tools, guns, Chinaware, watches. Want dogs, guns, antiques, coins, medals, old books, relics. J. Dalton, Wellsville, Ohio.

Have new set H. G. Wells' "Outline of History," 4 vols. What have you? Harry Briscoe, 3210 No. 19th St., St. Louis, Mo.

Want old flintlock guns, cylinder guns, old Indian relics. Have anything. F. G. Carnes, Yoakum, Texas.

60-acre farm, 6-room house, barn, orchard, meadow, spring. Want car truck, or? J. E. Howerton, R. 2, Bonnerdale, Ark.

Will give 12 magazines, ACE-HIGH and others and souvenir of Buffalo in exchange for 5 movie magazines, 1925-26-27. Write. M. Calabrese, 427—14th St., Buffalo, N. Y.

Have shotgun, uke, 1-minute camera, 1-tube radio, focusing flashlight. Will give all for motorcycle. John Polk, 323 Main St., Evansville, Ind.

Irish setter puppies, imported blood lines, registered, guaranteed to please. Want radio speaker, tubes, batteries, guns. H. J. Cobb, Banner, Miss.

Have toy trains, mandolin, Federal course, radio parts. Want type, cameras, movie films. B. G. Deits, 2640 So. 62nd St., Philadelphia, Pa.

Want stamps, "National Geographics," old books, anything. Have curios, stamps, novelties, big exchange list. Warden, 40 Oakland, Pasadena, Calif.

Trade new double-shotgun, spotlight, Kodak, special model, new horsehide coat, size 36, for? Edward Micolites, 50 Harlem St., Worcester, Mass.

Want model airplane, tools, materials, dumb-bells, or? Have books, watches, etc. John Workman, Thebes, Ill.

Moving picture camera for taking moving pictures. Want movie projector and film. Have M. O. goods for movie film. Frank L. Pennington, Vernon, Texas.

Have camping outfit, 16-in. boots, size 8, complete 3-tube radio, stamps, etc. Exchange for rifles, swords, guns, or? M. S. Ward, 1922 Crotona Parkway, Bronx, N. Y.

Have violin and bow, radio, movie film, knitter, tattoo outfit, camera, etc. What have you? Albert Eyre, 278 Liberty St., Camden, N. J.

270 acres in Klickitat County, Wash. Make sheep or dairy ranch, alfalfa, buildings, timber. On good road. For? C. L. Elliott, 460 College St., Portland, Ore.

Want books. Have post card projector, ice skates, camera tripod, and tenor banjo case. A. Filner, 1116 Laramie, Manhattan, Kans.

Will send 75 different stamps for every arrowhead sent me. K. E. Pugmire, Waupaca, Wisc.

Post card views of Waterbury to exchange for "Wide Awake" or other old-time novels. Charles A. Welton, R. F. D. 5, Waterbury, Conn.

Want radio course, radio parts, sets. Have small phonograph, 2000-ft. motion picture film, comedy, standard gauge. Write. Herman Zachry, Lockesburg, Ark.

Want 2 straight-line condensers. Have radio parts and other things. Want small motor. Write. Wayne Storch, Beecher, Ill.

Have 3-tube all-wave radio, new. Want single motorcycle, good B-eliminator, or? Henry Ruhwiedel, 6016 Navarre Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Old gold and silver coins to trade for old U. S. Colonial coppers. Send list. M. E. Brown, 2951 Lycaste, Detroit, Mich.

Ferrets, books, tools, 32 x 3½, 33 x 4½ tires, Oldsmobile engine, radiators. Want coins, medals, gold paper money, Indian relics. J. Dalton, Wellsville, Ohio.

Want binoculars, guns, diamonds, tents, luggage, printing, books, wrist watch, typewriters, etc. Have good foreign stamps. A. Welo, 2608 Chicago, Minneapolis, Minn.

Have stereoscope and 48 views, 1-tube radio, cigarette lighter, books, magazines, Spanish-American grammar, etc. Want portable 1-tube set, cornet, etc. John Bolmareich, 2524 Salmon St., Philadelphia, Pa.

Have trio of fighting game chickens, white bantams. Want rifle, coons, or? Ansel Kanning, R. F. D. 4, Gray Court, S. C.

Have precanceled stamps, magazines and large list to swap for coins, relics, guns, or? Max Gans, 160 Stanwood St., Boston, 21, Mass.

Have instructions for collecting and preserving butterflies and moths. Will swap for its value in coins. R. Wagar, Hanley, Sask., Canada.

Have .45-70 Springfield carbine, good condition, Marbel's skinning knife, numerous parts of Ford 1927 motor, etc. Want guns, or? William Lefanty, Brookfield, Ill.

Want washing machine engine or 1-cyl. motorcycle engine and 6-v. generator. Have guns, radio, etc. E. R. Becker, Gallatin, Mo.

Want .12-ga. shotgun. Have 150 cloth-bound popular fiction books, A-1 condition. Will send list if wanted. C. W. Morris, Whitely, Pa.

Super-Elto outboard, Underwood portable, Tulloss "Typewriting" course, electric lantern, Bunn special Illinois watch for Mirakel binocular, .22 gun. E. M. Latshaw, Kennerdell, Pa.

Trade Penny camera, makes 9 shots, 4 x 5 plate, for post card camera. Ben Wolfinger, 812 Pearl St., Elkhart, Ind.

Have rings and nearly everything useful. Want chickens, land, furniture, tents, and tent fixtures. Seymour Bailey, Wadena, Iowa.

Have .303 Savage. Want 16-ga. shotgun, 17-ga. Remington automatic, or? P. M. Tracey, Lowell, Ind.

Have 32 magazines. What have you? Will Harrison, Room 402, 121 Sixth St., Hotel Strand, Pittsburgh, Pa.

Will exchange foreign postage stamps, Scott's catalogue basis, or stamp for stamp. F. Lubitz, 919 Edward St., Utica, N. Y.

Want mounted specimens, hawks, owls, etc. List to trade. Ray Wozniak, 519 So. Wisconsin Ave., Villa Park, Ill.

Have large inlaid antique music box, mandolin, 2 tennis racquets, victrola and records. Want automobile, wrist watch, or? Frank Maas, 181 Winfield Ave., Jersey City, N. J.

Have variety desert cacti, young Joshua trees, bottles, colored lilac by Death Valley sun. Want antiques. E. W. Dawson, 1709 Lewis Ave., Long Beach, Calif.

Have books by Zane Grey, etc. Want course in illustrating or cartooning, or? Jean Sherman, 2300 Calumet Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Will trade .30-30 or .32-20 Winchester rifles, A-1 condition, for good shotguns or hunting dog. E. Burkhammer, 1310 Goff Ave., Clarksburg, W. Va.

Coonhounds, blueticks, 6-months-old fur-bearing animals, ferrets, .22 rifle, radio. Also want fishing rod and reel, for? V. W. Willadsen, Box 112, Marquette, Nebr.

Have Star rare coin encyclopedia, "Boy Mechanic," vol. 1, and stamps. Want magneto, metronome or electrical meters. Joh. Reichardt, R. R. 1, Morrison, Mo.

12 size, 7-jewel Elgin watch, also old watch movements, trade for carpenter tools, saw, brace, etc. Jos. Huschle, 1432 Cedar Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio.

Want to exchange drawings with amateur artists, everywhere. Write. Ira Swindall, Jr., R. 1, Box 98, Gatesville, Texas.

Will exchange pine needle basketry, hand made, for fancy work. Mrs. Marshall Jones, R. 1, Box 46, Georgetown, Miss.

Exchange fine stamps, books, radios, leather coat, Hawkins' guides, horsehair belt, for books, banjo, chemical apparatus, rifle. Austin Windsor, Hornsby, Ill.

Want motion picture camera. Send full description and state your wants. Box 13, Hamden, Conn.

Have La Salle's "Higher Accountancy" course. Want almost anything. Send list. Long Crotts, Box 1341, Winston-Salem, N. C.

Have 24 sheets of designs. Will trade for tattoo machines. Anyone having tattoo outfits for trade, write. Dutch Rosensteel, Box 1268, Uniontown, Pa.

Will trade canvas pictures of dogs for any 1,000 different European stamps. Also 1 German bond coupon for 50 stamps. W. E. Swanson, 28—5th St., Weehawken, N. J.

Want old gold, silver, nickel, tinfoil, medicinal plant, etc. Will give good trade. Have many articles to select from. Lawrence, 2502 W. 19th Pl., Cleveland, Ohio.

Want diamond ring, stud or pin, sleeping bag, Stevens diamond model. Have cowboy equipment. Box 733, Valley City, N. D.

Have course in hypnotism, air-rifle, etc. Want sword, old coins, tenor banjo, penmanship course, or? Harold McDonal, Box 115, Trum, W. Va.

Have deer horns, books by Zane Grey, Curwood, etc. Will trade for violin-guitar, or what have you? Edwin Brady, Daphne, Ala.

Have guns, relics, stamps and many other things. Will trade for almost anything. Ralph Thompson, Box 861, Harvey, No. Dak.

Will give 150 foreign stamps for each old coin sent me. William Michaelis, Jr., 25 Williams St., Crystal Lake, Illinois.

Have 3 diamond sets, magazines, 2 holsters. Want old U. S. coins, or? Write. T. B. Cassels, Star Route, Cornwell, S. C.

Have battery charger, 50 magazines, wallet in good condition. Want typewriter, or? Your list for mine. Irving Klau, 1216—49th St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Have leather leggins, telegraph instruments, golf balls, Kodak, boxing equipment. Want small portable radio, motorcycle, lathe. H. P. Brentlinger, 1625 So. 11th St., Terre Haute, Ind.

Will exchange 2 packages of sachet perfumed powders for each Indian arrowhead or 12 for each Indian club. Fred Brunasy, 526 Hazle St., Wilkes-Barre, Pa.

Have blue iris bulbs. Want guns, camera, or fishing tackle. Will give full value in bulbs for whatever you send. A. T. Anderson, Malabar, Fla.

Trade sea turtles, alligators, star fish, sea shells, sea beans, coconuts in husks, for old coins, cornet, drums, or? J. Gallagher, 1021 Alabama Ave., W. Palm Beach, Fla.

Have complete correspondence, mechanical, drafting courses. Will trade for anything of value. All letters answered. John Geraci, 644 Rees St., Chicago, Ill.

Want old gold, diamonds, stones. Have watches, musical instruments, typewriter. A. Wilson, 7400 Melrose Ave., Detroit, Mich.

Have 1928 Scott's catalogue, watermark, detector, stamp tongs, Star coin book. Want large U. S. cent. Archie Howard, Rossford, Ohio.

Have gas engine, Klaxon horn, Remington typewriter, Gabriel Snubbers, vacuum sweeper, etc. Want repeating .12- and .22-ga. guns, etc. Roy Troutman, Wood, Pa.

Have 5-cell searchlight, violin course, 25 vols. Mark Twain's works, encyclopedia, Indian relics. Want punching bag, motorcycle, anything. Dickson Sharp, Crawley, W. Va.

Want L. L. Cooke or Prof. Titus courses. What do you want? J. R. Young, General Delivery, Albany, N. Y.

Have 7-tube radio, all electric, no batteries. Want 6-cyl. auto. Coupe or Sedan. H. Snyder, 5755 La Salle St., Chicago, Ill.

Have road show outfit. Want 7x11 printing press. J. G. Davis, Belen, N. M.

Anyone interested in stamp or coin collecting and exchanging, please write me. Have thousands of stamps. Byron Hullet, Protection, Kans.

One magazine and gold quarts given for every half-cent in good condition sent me. W. G. Anthony, Mebane, N. C.

Have Wilson's brand new, hardened steel, hockey shoe skates, size 7. Want good tennis racket or binoculars. Myron Nalbandian, 9 Hospital St., Providence, R. I.

121 acres of land, 15 miles from Little Rock, Ark. Want small farm near Denver or in eastern Kansas, or? E. J. Cordon, R. 1, Box 42-A, Mabelvale, Ark.

Will exchange stamps on cover, old rare books, "National Geographics," for books on history. Clarence Griffin, Spindale, N. C.

Want shells, Indian relics, stone relics, etc. Have stone relics, minerals, chinchilla rabbits, camera, or? Gerald Hunting, Box 183, Vernal, Utah.

Have discarded clothing. Want printing material, courses, etc. Send list. F. Miller, 909 S. Joliet St., Joliet, Ill.

Have accordion, 21 keys, 8 basses. Want motorcycle, or what? W. Bogdanoff, General Delivery, Vacaville, Calif.

Want Scott 20th Century International album, either or both parts. Have stamps and other articles. All letters answered. B. B. Griffin, Central Y. M. C. A., Waterbury, Conn.

Trade toy steam engine in good condition for tennis racket in good condition. John Gerstner, 1109 S. 53rd St., Philadelphia, Pa.

Have stamps, canoe, paddle, books, chemical goods. Want coins, taxidermy course or tools, curios, magic course, or? R. C. Dean, Boy River, Minn.

Will trade parchment land grant 100 years old for 3,000 South American stamps. W. E. Swanson, 28—5th St., Weehawken, N. J.

Have good house-numbering and directory business, lucrative, traveling. Want 10 acres or more in Southwest or Arkansas, good soil. G. F. Judson, General Delivery, Amarillo, Texas.

Have 5-room house and lot, 40 miles north of Tampa, Fla., in Zephyrville, Fla. Will trade for what? C. L. Perkins, Leeds, Ala.

Have .22 rifle, telescope, pocket watch, field glasses, ball gloves, flashlight. Want h.p. rifle or motorcycle. Everett Gardner, 205 E. 6th St., Dayton, Ky.

Have movie machine, stamps, arrowheads, post cards, coins, roller skates. Want 1927 or 1928 Scott's stamp catalogue. Irving Kass, 536 Hillcrest, Moultrie, Ga.

Large camera, wrist watch, safety razors, Chinese rings, gold pen, art course and instruments. Want small camera, watch, typewriter, musical instruments. C. W. Knece, Laurelville, Ohio.

Have violin, many other things. Want typewriter, or? William Wild, 50 Vesta Ave., Edgewood, Wheeling, W. Va.

Have .45-90 Springfield .22 repeating rifle, .32 automatic, .36-ga. shotgun, 17-j. Elgin watch, 15-j. Southbend. Watches need repairing. Want radio parts. T. A. Cooper, Star Route, Wellington, Texas.

Have electric fan, fishing rod, air-rifle, No. 3 erector set. Want ¼-h.p. AC motor. Will answer all letters. Frank Guyer, 109 Heywood St., Worcester, Mass.

Have check writer, 10,000-ft. movie film. Want tourist tent, or? R. Meyer, 27 Marie, Ecorse, Mich.

Have 200-lb. Milo barbell with 3 courses of instructions. Want Benrus shoe, A-proof wrist watch. W. A. Robinson, Jr., Box 868, Old Fort, N. C.

Want recent newspapers of small towns. What do you want? Miss A. Selzer, Box 643, Barrington, N. J.

Have 2 Rosaries, 20 travel trunk labels, 500 foreign stamps. Want coins, or? Albert Goodell, 29 Hartley St., Bethnal Green, London, E. 2, England.

Have .22 rifle, wild rabbits, pigeons, fountain pen, magazines. Want Liederman course, Indian relics, cactus, horntoads, or? Ray E. Henry, R. 3, Gypsum, Kans.

Will trade 8x12 army duck umbrella tent, good condition, also Corona typewriter. Want radio or what have you? T. G. Mauritzen, 528 Wall St., Los Angeles, Calif.

Have books, bayonets, Forest Ranger course, etc. Want old coins, camping outfit, rifle, or? Charles Ash, 3218 Young, Louisville, Ky.

Want traps, motorcycle, automatic .16-ga., .22 rifle long automatic. Have human skeleton, rifle, magazines, key and sounder. Ralph Izard, Tyro, Ark.

Have skull, 2 peace pipes, string of bone beads. Will trade for young collie pup, male, or Indian relics. Edward B. Moseley, R. 4, Box 210-A, Waco, Texas.

Have 8-tube Master Super-heterodyne radio. Want automatic or pump shotgun or h.p. rifle. Martin Hetzel, 4145 W. 21st Pl., Chicago, Ill.

Will swap coins, curios, Filippino spears, shield, bolo, cane knife and guns, for guns, spurs, or 10-ft. drover's bull whip. Leonard Carl, 187 Cora St., San Francisco, Calif.

First day covers wanted. Have view cards, magazines and few first day covers to trade. Edw. Hoffmeister, 6059 Allman St., Philadelphia, Pa.

Have Columbia grafonola, Waltham wrist watch, large umbrella tent 6x82, German binoculars. Want pedigreed German police pup. R. S. Hoffman, 811 Walton Ave., New York City.

Have karakul fur sheep, Persian lamb, banjo, shotgun, etc. Want live mink, muskrats, red fox, cross fox. Clarence Orser, Colgate, No. Dak.

Have ¼-HAC motor, Brownie camera, chargers, speakers, radio parts, 5 outfits, watches, Indian beaded chaps. Want 8x binoculars, or? W. F. O'Brien, Pierceton, Ind.

Send me some baggage labels and stickers from hotels, etc., of your city, and I will send you some from mine. W. Parker, 4950 McPherson Ave., St. Louis, Mo.

Want old documents, books, autographs, almanacs, newspapers, scrap books. Have binoculars, coins, stamps, swords, cameras. J. Settel, 24 Crosby Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Wood bowling ball and magazines to trade for guns, or? Swap lists. Ted Gaudell, 708 North Ave., Waukegan, Ill.

Have formulas, books, ice skates, roller skates, date stamper, volume of mechanic books. Want typewriter or anything. Steven Reylek, Floodwood, Minn.

Have electrical engineering books, radio parts, business course and all kinds of electrical tools. What have you? Carl Floyd, R. F. D. 5, Wolfe City, Texas.

Have poultry course, dairy, poultry, agriculture and 2 agriculture year books, 2 razors with strap, etc. What have you? Frank J. Halwink, 2300 W. Chicago Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Have books, magazines, radio parts, crystal, watch, traps, stamps, Ford parts. Anything considered. A. L. Soule, R. 1, Charleston, Tenn.

Have radio parts, tubes, books, dry cell motors, tumbling course, silver tie clasp, etc. Want human skull, or? W. C. McCullough, 4371 W. 127th St., Rocky River, Ohio.

U. S. cents wanted, 1804, '05, '06, '08, '09, '10, '11, '18, '21, in very good condition. William Seyferth, 10151 Kercheval, Detroit, Mich.

Trade radio parts for precanceled and air mail stamps, also trade post cards for stamps. Charles R. Van Pelt, 918 Livingston St., Cincinnati, Ohio.

Have 3-A box camera, 8x binoculars and case, .22-cal. Winchester, books, Crosley cone speaker and 275 magazines, for? S. T. Huckleberry, Hulbert, Okla.

Want old Hawaiian books, National Geographic magazines, February, 1924. Have large miscellaneous exchange list. Sinclaire, Box 1307, Los Angeles, Calif.

Want all kinds of semi-precious stones, agates or unidentified stones. Have old coins, arrowheads, chinchilla traps. Frank Parke, Hailey, Idaho.

Have binoculars, telescope, camera, guitar, stamp collections, coins, rare documents, books, watches. What have you? J. Settel, 24 Crosby St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Want 3- or 4-ft. model airplane, .12-ga. double-barreled shotgun. Have all kinds of old coins, or? John Surdy, Terrace P. O., Pa.

Want radio, fire arms, printers' material, typewriter (No. 10 Royal). Have most anything. E. G. Smith, World's Exchange, 623 W. Boyd St., Shamokin, Pa.

Have 7½-watt transmitter, 2-tube shot-wave receiver, 4-tube radio to trade. What have you? Thos. Gregan, 55 Pearl St., N. Weymouth, Mass.

Have wrist watch, drum, bugle, swords, hunting knife, knapsack, trench helmet, violin, camera, books, etc. Want movie camera, projector, or? E. G. Wells, 116 Chandler St., Boston, Mass.

Have fencing swords, 65,000 stamps. Will trade for old bicycle or movie machine. Arthur C. Berger, 1317 Shaughnessy St., Chicago, Ill.

Have World War bullet belt and spurs, golf club. Trade for guns. F. Small, 4032 Claude St., Verdun, P. 2, Canada.

Coin book; tells value of old U. S. coins. Swap for 10 United cigar certificates. Box 876, City Hall Sta., New York City.

Want Robbins & Lawrence pepperbox, Allen & Wheelock percussion and other old-time guns. Box 250, Angels Camp, Calif.

Will give my entire lot of 500 to 1,000 precancels and canceled stamps, present issue, for good rifle, or? Arthur White, 18 West St., Covington, Ky.

Want good .22 rifle. Have brand new Brandes' Superior earphones. Stephen Radocy,, 36 Greenwich St., New York City.

Will swap one new Honer's Marine Band harmonica for 200 Wrigley's gum wrappers from Spearmint, Juicy Fruit and Doublemint gums. J. Anast, 8115 Normal Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Old U. S. coins to exchange for Lincoln books, medals, silk badges and Civil War envelopes with Lincoln portrait. Michael Serdy, 546 Tammany Way, Homestead, Pa.

Want 110-v. variable speed motor, ⅛ or 1/10-h.p. No junk wanted. Have everything to trade. I. G. Olney, General Delivery, Boise, Idaho.

Have radio equipment and small Barnes lathe, complete. Want band saw, 4- or 6-in. jointer, or what have you? Leslie Braymer, Raytown, Mo.

Would like to trade pennants. Must be good ones. Charles A. Allen, 92 Colony St., Winnipeg, Man., Canada.

Trade instructions for hand checkers for Clayton magazines, any technical book or course. T. F. Moore, R. 2, La Grange, NN. C.

Indian relics, arrawheads, petrified wood, oysters, clams, snails, books, ore specimens, sea shells, etc., from other states wanted. J. E. Welch, 243 Laurel St., Ashland, Ore.

Will trade postcard views of New Orleans (no office buildings), for views of your city. Foreign trades invited. Roger L. Follette, 538 Jackson Ave., New Orleans, La.

Have antique beds, musical instruments, modern guns. Want relic guns, or? Floyd Williams, Bland, Mo.

Have souvenir of Mt. Vernon, vest-pocket flashlight, auto wrench and tire repair hand device. Want any old coins. R. W. Hawkins, 618 Minnesota Ave., N. E., Bennings, D. C.

Have hundreds of photographic magazines of different kinds. Will exchange for camera, or? F. P. Raab, Box 52, Moulton, Texas.

Have 2-h.p. boat engine, child's bed, 6-v. battery, 410-ga. shotgun. Trade bed for music course, other articles for h. p. rifle, or? C. R. Mader, 446 W. 4th St., Ridgeville, Ind.

Mechanical engineering library, 8 vols. and typewriter, for high-powered repeating rifle. S. S. Greenfield, Fairport, N. Y.

Have old copies of magazines. Want old sheets of music or magazines. E. G. Snow, Light House Road, Digby, N. S., Canada.

Have cartooning course, 34 lessons, coin book and coins. Want stamp collection. Send list. Charles Kohler, Jr., 611 No. 32nd St., Philadelphia, Pa.

1,000 U. S. and 1,000 foreign stamps. First 160 United or Schulte certificates takes them. W. Manson, 358 11th St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Precanceled stamps wanted. For each 100 stamps (no straight edges or damaged), I will send a bound novel of recent issue. H. J. Morse, 218½ W. 4th St., Los Angeles, Calif.

Want motion picture machine, or? Have radio parts, Meccano outfit, books, etc. Send your list. A. Regone, 2254 Washington Ave., Bronx, N. Y.

Postage stamps, big stock. Will exchange for United, Schulte, milk, soap coupons, merchandise, clothing. Roeder, 52 Smith Terrace, Stapleton, N. Y.

WANTED—INFORMATION

Are you looking for any one who has been missing for a long time? If so, write down, either typed or hand-printed, all particulars and we will publish your notice in ACE-HIGH. *Notices may be listed anonymously if you so desire. Before taking action concerning any answers received, be sure to lay the matter before us. We assume no responsibility for this department. Do not send any money to strangers. Notify us at once when you have found your man.*

NELSON, CARL—Last known address, Deer Lodge, Montana, formerly Cambridge, Wisconsin, possibly gone to California. Sister heard from him several years ago. She would appreciate any information concerning him. Anna Gilbertson, 1028 N. Menard Ave., Chicago, Ill.

COMRADES—Of Company "K," 26th Inf., between July 3, 1907, and June 15, 1909, please write to your old comrade, Dolphus Adams, Soldiers' Home, Calif.

BRITRITSKI, JOHN J.—Last heard from at Hoisington, Kans. John, please write to one who loves you, at Hamlin, Texas. If anyone knows this man's address, please write. W. B. R., c/o ACE-HIGH MAGAZINE.

PEPPERS, M. A. (MRS.)—Left Batesville, Ark., 3 years ago. Supposed to have gone to Mississippi. Anyone knowing her whereabouts please write. J. D. Arnold, Judsonia, Ark.

P. H. C.—Don't you remember your Mississippi pal, Irene? Slim would meet you anywhere in the U. S. on January 1st. Write to same address, but send no money. Irene.

WILSON, FRED—Left Queensville, Ontario, for the West, August, 1927. Last heard of at New Westminster, B. C. March, 1928, I wrote you, Fred, but letter was returned. Please write to your old pal, G. Johnson (Slim), at Ontario Hospital, Orillia, Ontario.

AROUND THE STOVE

CHANGED HIS OPINION

Dear Editor:

Until just recently I was of the opinion that all Western stories were alike, but since arising from a sick-bed where a friend very generously gave me several copies of ACE-HIGH *and* COWBOY STORIES, *I am very much converted and find that I am an ardent reader of these Clayton publications. Your "Around the Stove" section is a corking idea.*

I hope some of your many readers in the different states, but especially foreign countries, will be interested in having me for a pen pal. I am 20, 5 ft. 10 in. tall, have brown eyes and reddish-brown hair. I promise whoever will correspond with me, to be both humorous and full of information about the various interesting and historic spots of New England.

Yours for keeping ACE-HIGH *ace-high, I remain,*

Very truly yours,

ERNEST G. WELLS.

116 *Chandler St., Boston, Mass.*

"ACTION AND THRILLS, BY GUM"

Dear Editor:

Enclosed please find my best poetical attempt. At least, I think the readers will agree with me that my efforts were well directed even though a bit amateurish. Just the same, I want to congratulate the Clayton publications and also the wise hombres who have the good sense to read the one and only ACE-HIGH.

With best wishes for continued success, I am,

Faithfully a reader,

TOM HIRA.

135 *Ryerson Ave., Paterson, N. J.*

I've read old ACE-HIGH *for quite a few years,*
And know it just can't be beat,
It chases your sorrows and dries up your tears
When you and your trials meet.
If ever you're lonesome and all by your ownsome,
Don't sit around and mope,
Just put on your hat and right after that
To the corner store go at a lope.
Then throw up your twenty and you'll receive plenty,
Of action and thrills, by gum,
And bang goes your troubles, like so many bubbles,
And instead of sighing you'll hum.
So get you a-going, 'cause the storekeeper's knowing
Just what you've come to buy;
And you'll grab with greed and rush home to read
Your copy of old ACE-HIGH.

FROM AN IRISHMAN

Dear Editor:

I trust you will accept a word of praise from an Irishman on the general excellence of the ACE-HIGH MAGAZINE. *I consider it the best story-teller on the market at the present day. The stories are written in such a racy human vein that the reader's interest is held right from the beginning. More important still, is that the fiction is clean, healthy and stimulating.*

I would like to correspond with some of your readers in the States, men and women, and I will answer all letters.

Wishing you and ACE-HIGH *every success, I am,*

Yours sincerely,

JOSEPH W. CLERY.

67 *Heytesbury St., Dublin, Irish Free State.*

FROM AN OLD DEPUTY SHERIFF

Dear Editor:

I have been a reader of this magazine for quite a length of time and being an old deputy sheriff for years in the Southwest, I enjoy many of the different authors' stories. I have given out some of my stories of my real experiences, and when put together properly they aren't bad. As the present saying goes, "I get a great kick" out of some of these stories as I can tell those of real experience or those who have a more clear idea or imagination of real facts that existed in the days gone by. I am carrying scars a-plenty to show that the other fellow was a good shot also. I didn't escape without injuries.

I am enclosing the little piece stating what I would like to have in exchange for what I have. I am living in retirement now, letting the other fellow fight it out. I have done my duty long since.

I thank you and wishing lots of success to ACE-HIGH, *I am,*

Yours truly,
W. W. KADEL.

858 *N. Chester Ave., Pasadena, Calif.*

A CALL FOR CANADIAN MOUNTIES

Dear Editor:

I have been reading your magazine for quite a few years and I'm telling you it can't be beat. The stories are fine. Keep up the good work. But why not have two fast action novels instead of a serial? I sure do wish ACE-HIGH *came out every week because two weeks is too long to wait.*

Please, Mr. Editor, if you print this letter, I'll boost your magazine for life. And if there are any Canadian Mounties who see this letter, I sure do wish they would write to me because I want to ask some information of them. I will appreciate it very much if some of them will write to me.

Wishing your magazine the best of success and thanking you in advance, I remain,

Very truly yours,
FRANK ELLIOTT.

935 *W. Dakota St., Philadelphia, Pa.*

LIKES MacDONALD BEST

Dear Editor:

I have been a constant reader of ACE-HIGH *and I think it is the best magazine on the market. You have the best authors of any magazine on the market. They are all good but I like William Colt MacDonald the best of all.*

I am a lonesome boy and I would like to have pen pals from all over the world. I am 6 ft. tall, have blond hair and blue eyes. I would like very much to have you print this in "Around the Stove."

Yours truly,
M. A. COMPTON, JR.

c/o Radio Station KGHF, Pueblo, Colo.

FOR TWO YEARS

Dear Editor:

I have been reading your magazine for about two years and although I receive seven other publications, I have not as yet found its equal.

Would like to write and receive letters from young men and girls all over the world. I am nearing 20, have light hair and brown eyes. I am particularly interested in sports.

An ACE-HIGH *fan,*
JULIUS G. BRADY.

Box 63, Daphne, Ala.

WANTS BOOKS

Dear Editor:

This, no doubt, will be somewhat of an unusual thing to you. And I wonder if you would do me the favor of inserting a piece in the ACE-HIGH MAGAZINE *appealing to your readers for some books to read. I am 16 years old and have been sick for the last 4 years. Here's my story:*

While swimming four years ago I heard a cry far out in the water. I saw my boy friend Jolin sinking and hollering for help. I took a canoe to save him. When I reached him I put him into the canoe and started to paddle back. Then all at once there was a crash—a big steamboat struck us, my pal drowned, and here I am a cripple with a fractured hip and a broken back. Won't you see that some kind reader of ACE-HIGH *gets me some books to kill the monotony of life. Please Mr. Storekeeper.*

Wishing all the success in the world to you, your column and ACE-HIGH, *I remain,*

So truly yours,
WILLIAM R. KOLBURN.

667 *Classon Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.*

ABOUT TO HOLE UP

Dear Editor:

Am just coming into Cleveland intending to hole-up there for the winter after being on the lakes all summer. Every summer the wanderlust hits me, and not being tied down, why I just air out somewhere. For the last two years, I have read every issue of ACE-HIGH MAGAZINE *and continually look forward to the new issues. I start a magazine by reading the complete novel first and then take pot-luck on the short stories. Of course, there's usually a good serial, too, that finds me anxious to read more of. I think* ACE-HIGH *appeals to me more than any of its class in magazines. Long may it live!*

Am young, white, free and would love to hear from some of the romantic and adventurous-loving readers, both sexes. Please insert my little plea and greatly oblige.

Very sincerely yours,
EARL HARDESTY.

General Delivery, Cleveland, Ohio.

A LONELY EX-COWBOY

Dear Editor:

I am a constant reader of your magazine and it sure helps to while away lonely nights.

I am a lonely ex-cowboy and I want to correspond with young girls and boys of 17 to 22. I'll tell them all I know of the West Texas country. I am 5 ft. 11 in. tall, 19 years old and have dark brown hair and eyes. I was incapacitated from riding by an acoident last year in a rodeo.

Sincerely yours,
RAYPHIELD R. BRINKER.

210 *West Second, San Angelo, Tex.*

IN TWO WORDS

Dear Editor:

I have used "The Bargain Counter" in your magazine several times and have always been satisfied, so it is only natural that I should want to use it again. You will find my ad at the bottom of this page.

I will not trouble you with a long letter telling you about your magazine because it can be done in two words, "its wonderful!"

If it is possible, I would like to correspond with a Forest Ranger or someone who could tell me something about that kind of work, as I am thinking of trying for a Forestry job.

Yours truly,
FRED ZUFALL.

4102 *Hudson Blvd., Union City, N. J.*

A VERY NEW BOOSTER

Dear Editor:

Hello everybody, may I squeeze in "Around the Stove" and have a little chat with you all?

I am now a reader of ACE-HIGH, *but I must say I have just become one by reading your Second July number. Believe me or not, as you like, I plainly see I have cheated myself greatly by not reading your magazine before.*

Say, how would some of you like to become a pen pal to a little girl who lives in New Orleans and has never traveled out of Louisiana? She's 'most 17 years old (a grandma, huh?), 5 ft. 4 in short, weighs 127 lbs. (very, very skinny, is she not?). She has brown eyes and rather wavy brown hair. She is of French and English descent, but a pure red-blooded American, born under the "Freedom of the Stars and Stripes" of good old U. S. A.

Wishing you and your magazine continued success, and faithfully hoping to have my mail box stuffed full to the top with letters.

Remember now, write and you'll sure get an answer.

A very new booster,
(MISS) MARGUERITE ROBICHEAUX.

2818 *Milan St., New Orleans, La.*

FOR THREE YEARS

Dear Editor:

I am enclosing slip and ad which I would like inserted in your magazine.

May I add a word of praise to the many that you have received for your magazine? I have been reading it for about three years and to say that I enjoy the stories would be putting it mildly, indeed.

Say, readers, how about a few letters stampeding this way? We are just country farmers and have time to read and write a few and they would sure chase away the blues.

Very truly yours,
(MISS) TENNIPON KELLEY.

R. 3, Box 179, Tulsa, Okla.

How 17 Friends said "Merry Xmas" with same Tobacco

A timely hint concerning the right tobacco for pipe smokers on your Christmas list

When sixteen of a man's friends send Edgeworth to him for Christmas, it looks as though there's no doubt about the kind he wants when he wants it! Here's what happened to Mr. Fitzpatrick last Christmas:

Evanston, Ill.
Larus & Bro. Co., December 31, 1927
Richmond, Va.
Dear Sirs:

Of course you know from your sales just how popular your brands of tobacco are, but perhaps what follows will illustrate something of the identity, so to speak, of the users of Edgeworth.

I happen to be blest with a host of very fine friends, mostly "highbrows"—professors, scientists, etc. Generally at Christmas time they show their remembrance and all that with some little gift—a box of cigars, fishing tackle, a book—all that sort of thing.

Well, this Christmas many seemed to center on *tobacco.* Now, mark you, these fellows have no communication with each other. They live in widely separated parts of the country, so it was no "put-up" joke on me or anything like that. But here came seventeen boxes of tobacco, and sixteen of them the familiar blue "Edgeworth!" The seventeenth was a very flossy walnut, brass-trimmed box, but if I know tobacco, the contents were Edgeworth with a little perique in it.

Just a coincidence, perhaps, but a queer one. Am not an habitual smoker of Edgeworth, so they weren't catering to any especial taste of mine. Looks like a consensus of opinion among the "highbrows"—or quite a batch of 'em—that Edgeworth is *the* stuff, the proper caper for a gift.

Sincerely yours,
F. W. Fitzpatrick.

Edgeworth Ready-Rubbed comes in three favorite gift sizes for Christmas—the pound glass humidor, the pound tin, and the very attractively decorated half-pound tin. Each size is packed in a specially inviting gift carton, printed in gay colors. Prices—$1.65 for the pound humidor. $1.50 for the pound tin. And 75c for the half-pound tin.

Please ask your tobacco dealer to show you these Christmas packages. If he cannot supply you, we gladly offer the following service:

Send us $1.65 for each pound humidor, $1.50 and 75c respectively for each pound and half-pound tin of Ready Rubbed to be shipped; also a list of the names and addresses of those you wish to remember, with your personal greeting card for each friend.

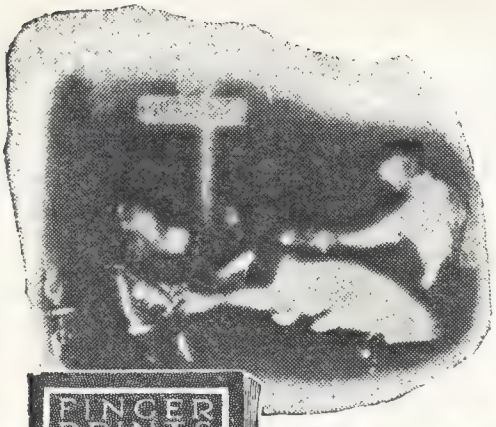
We will gladly attend to sending the Christmas Edgeworth to your friends, all delivery charges prepaid.

Personal: Perhaps you yourself are not acquainted with Edgeworth. If so, send your name and address to Larus & Brother Company. We shall be glad to send you free samples—generous helpings of both Edgeworth Ready-Rubbed and Edgeworth Plug Slice.

Edgeworth is sold in various sizes. Both Edgeworth Ready-Rubbed and Edgeworth Plug Slice are packed in small, pocket-size packages, in handsome humidors, holding a pound, and also in several handy in-between sizes.

For the free samples, kindly address Larus & Brother Company, 26 South 21st Street, Richmond, Va.

On your radio—tune in on WRVA, Richmond, Va.—the Edgeworth Station. Wave length 270 meters. Frequency 1110 Kilocycles.—Special Feature: The "Edgeworth Club" Hour every Wednesday Evening at nine o'clock; Eastern Standard Time.



Send For This FREE Book!

Telling of Fame and Rewards Won by Men Who Solve Finger Print Mysteries

" . . . . Shortly before midnight a young couple slipped away from the dance in a long, low, rakish roadster. Early next morning they were found dead beside the road."

Who had committed the murder?

Read the rest of the story on page 15 of our new Finger Print book. Find out how the murderers were traced, tried and convicted, and how a certain finger expert solved five murder mysteries and secured 97 convictions in less than a year.

In these thirteen stories of crime, daring robberies, mysterious murders, thrilling escapes, you'll read of men who achieved fame, big rewards and important positions in a short time through the study of finger prints.

Find out how you too, can become a Finger Print Expert.

Finger Print Experts Needed

More and more the detection of crime resolves itself into a problem of identification. More trained men are needed. University of Applied Science graduates get first choice at the big positions.

You can learn finger print identification in a few months in your spare time—at home.

Send the Coupon

This book cannot be bought at any newsstand or book store—but it will be sent to you FREE if you write to us at once. Thirty-two pages, illustrated in color with weird crime pictures. This book explains your opportunities in Finger Printing and tells all about our low prices and easy terms. Write for it today.

University of Applied Science
1920 Sunnyside Av., Dept. 15-69 Chicago, Ill.

University of Applied Science, Dept. 15-69
1920 Sunnyside Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Please send me free your 32-page illustrated book "Finger Prints." I understand that there is absolutely no obligation. Also tell me how I can become a finger print expert by studying a few months in spare time—and tell me all about your low prices and easy terms.

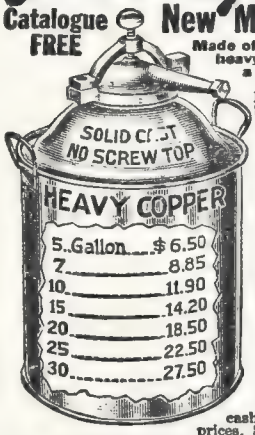
Name.....

Address.....

City..... State.....

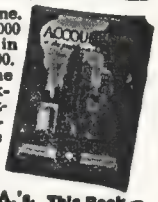
Factory Sale

Catalogue FREE — **New Model Boiler**



Made of EXTRA STRONG, heavy pure copper, with a 3-Inch Solid Brass Cap and Spout. Easily cleaned. No screw cap, no threads to get out of order. No burning of hands no trouble in taking off cover. Cap can be put on or taken off in a second by a simple twist of the thumb-screw on the top. Safe, practical, simple and durable. No article of such quality and utility ever sold at such low price. It's a low pressure boiler and pasteurizer. An ideal cooker for the home. Nothing better for general usages. It lasts a lifetime and gives real service and satisfaction. Above are strictly cash with order Factory prices. Send money order or check. Prompt shipment in plain, strong box. Only can worth having. **HOME MANUFACTURING CO.**
18 E. Kinzie St., Dept. 4450, Chicago, Illinois

Accounting
—THE CONTROL OF BUSINESS



Accountants command big income. Thousands needed. About 9,000 Certified Public Accountants in U. S. Many earn $5,000 to $20,000. We train you thoroughly at home in your spare time for C. P. A. examinations or executive accounting positions. Previous bookkeeping knowledge unnecessary—we prepare you from ground up. Our training is supervised by Wm. B. Castenholz, A. M., C. P. A., assisted by staff of C. P. A.'s. Low cost—easy terms. Write now for valuable 64-page book free.

This Book FREE!

LaSalle Extension University, Dept. 1275-H Chicago

GIVEN TO YOU

A Brand New High Grade Fine Tone

VIOLIN, TENOR BANJO, HAWAIIAN GUITAR, BANJO, CORNET, UKULELE, BANJO UKULELE, GUITAR OR MANDOLIN

We will give you without extra charge when you enroll, any instrument you select and teach you to play it by our NEW copyrighted easy to learn home-study course. Over 500,000 men, women, boys and girls have learned to play by our simplified method. Cost is only a few cents a day for lessons. No other charge. You pay while you learn. Instrument and first lessons sent on FREE trial. Write today.

CHICAGO CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOL OF MUSIC, INC.
1632 No. Halsted St., Dept. 728 Chicago, Ill.

ALWAYS Ask For DENISON'S—53 Years of Hits

Comedy-Dramas, Farces, Musical Comedies, Revues, **PLAYS** Vaudeville Acts, Monologs, Dialogs, Entertainments,
Chalk-Talk, Amateur Circus and Magic Books
Black-face Skits, Opening Choruses, **MINSTRELS** Snappy Posters, Window Cards.
Complete First-Parts, with Song Programs.
New Clever **COMEDY SONGS** for your show.
Make-up Goods, Wigs. CATALOGUE FREE.

T. S. DENISON & CO., 623 So. Wabash, Dept. 130, Chicago

SONGWRITERS

SUBSTANTIAL ADVANCE ROYALTIES ARE PAID upon publishable work. **ANYONE** having original ideas for Songs may submit poems for examination and advice.—**WALTER NEWCOMER,** 1674 B'way, N. Y.

Jewelry! The Gift Ideal! Direct from Maiden Lane

FAMOUS DIAMOND AND JEWELRY CENTER OF THE WORLD

NEWEST STYLES — LOWER PRICES! A FULL YEAR TO PAY!

Jewelers from everywhere come to Maiden Lane to buy. Save the "Middleman's" profit! Buy DIRECT from one of the oldest and largest Diamond Importers "on the Lane"—And on the most liberal credit terms! A FULL YEAR TO PAY. Avoid the Xmas Rush! Order Now!

Send $1 Only

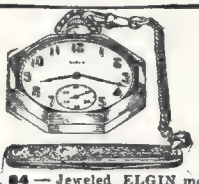
with order—give us a few personal facts—age, occupation, etc. If possible one or two references. RELATIONS STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL — NO DIRECT INQUIRIES MADE. We Ship promptly for

30 DAYS TRIAL

If entirely satisfied and convinced you cannot equalour values anywhere, cash or credit, local or mail order, pay small amount stated each month. Otherwise return selection and we cheerfully refund deposit. OUR POLICY—SATISFACTION GUARANTEED OR YOUR MONEY BACK!

No. 87--18kt. white gold Gent's ring. Richly engraved. Fine blue white diamond. **$86. $5.00 monthly**

No. 81--18 kt. white gold, exquisitely pierced. Fine, Blue white diamond, 2 Marquis emeralds. **$47.50 $4.23 monthly.**



No. 84 — Jeweled ELGIN movement, fine gold filled case, chain and knife. Complete in handsome gift box. **$1.12 monthly. Only $19.85**

No. 82--18 kt. white gold dinner ring. 3 fine blue white diamonds. 4 blue sapphires. **$42.50. $3.78 monthly.**

No. 83--18 kt. white gold beautiful design. Fine blue white diamond. **$59.75. $3.53 monthly.**

4 GENUINE 4 DIAMONDS
Fine Mesh Bracelet

No. 88
Solid white gold wrist watch, 4 diamonds, 4 oblong emeralds, 15 jewel adjusted guaranteed movement. Pierced flexible bracelet.
$3.53 monthly.

$39.75

GET THIS CATALOG before you buy jewelry anywhere. 1001 Gift Suggestions. DIAMONDS, WATCHES, JEWELRY, SILVERWARE, PERCOLATORS, CLOCKS, CAMERAS, etc. Rock bottom prices. PAY-AS-YOU-PLEASE! Your own terms (within reason). Sent FREE for the asking.

THE NATIONALLY ADVERTISED WARWICK

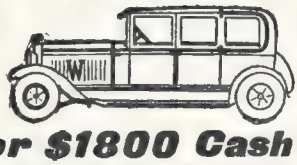
$16.50
is our record smashing XMAS Sale price on this nationally advertised WARWICK Gent's wrist watch. Jewelled movement, latest model white case, complete with mesh bracelet. **$1.40 monthly.**

EST. 1886

O. F. BALE & Co. 2131 Maiden Lane, New York N.Y.

How do you SPELL YOUR NAME?

In the window, top, body, wheel, or under the fender of the Buick Sedan pictured here are certain lucky letters cleverly worked into the picture by the artist. Can you find even one of these letters which appears in your last name?



TELL ME the letter you have found in the car. Remember, this letter must appear somewhere in your last name. Send it to me with your name and address. I am giving away four autos and many other prizes. You may be the one who will write me

AND WIN BUICK SEDAN or $1800 Cash

CERTIFICATE FOR $480.00 TO APPLY ON GRAND PRIZE SENT IMMEDIATELY AS BELOW IF YOU FIND A LETTER

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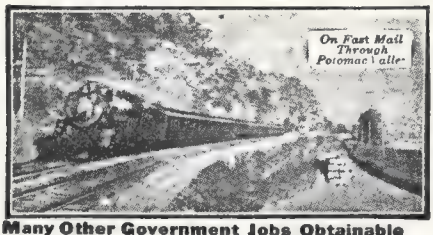

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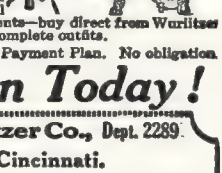

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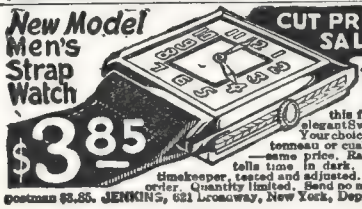

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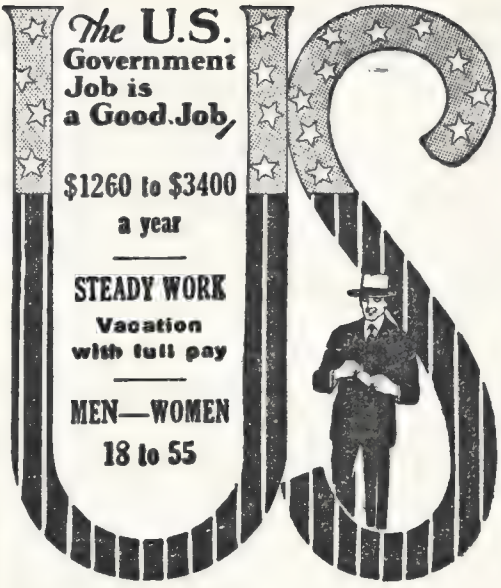

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All you do is demonstrate to housewives, automobile owners, stores, garages, etc., and take the orders. We don't sell to dealers. All business from your locality must come through you. *You alone get the profit on every order.* Every demonstration brings you 2 to 4 orders. Just put a little No-Frost on the glass. It doesn't show. It won't streak, smear, mar, or scratch. Yet keeps glass clean and clear as crystal. A necessity for every auto owner, storekeeper, street car conductor, locomotive engineer, housewife, and everyone who wears eyeglasses. Prevents accidents and takes the place of mechanical devices that don't work half the time.

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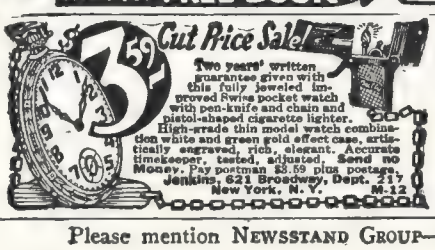

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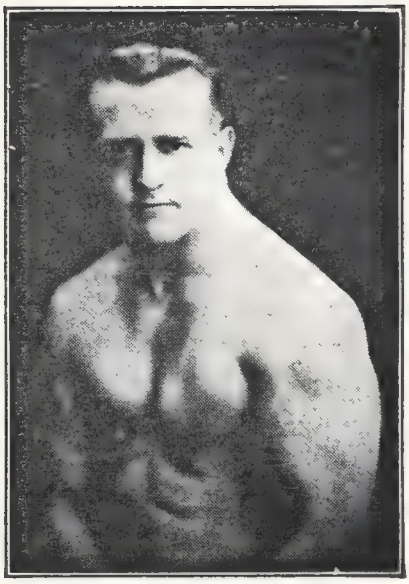

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CAN you do any of them? I can and many of my pupils can. It is remarkable the things a man really can do if he will make up his mind to be strong. I have taken men who were ridiculed because of their frail make-up and developed them into the strongest men of their locality.

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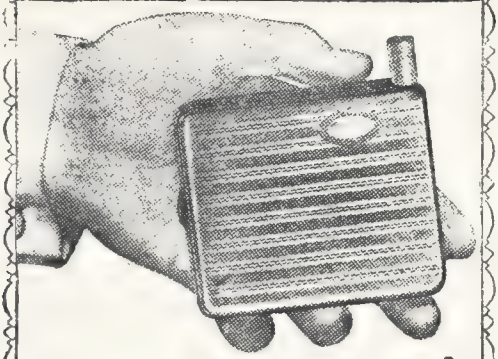

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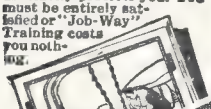

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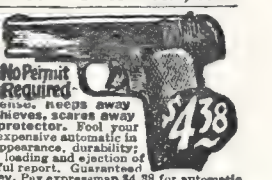

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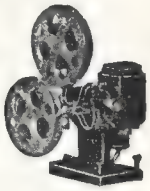

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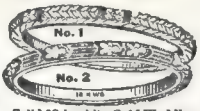

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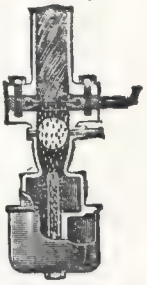

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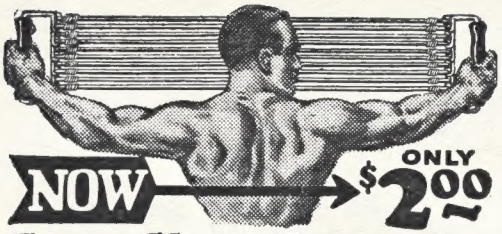

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Be a muscular Marvel. Have the muscles of a superman. Become strong for your health's sake or to astound your friends with extraordinary feats which only men of giant strength can do. The Giant Chest Expander and Progressive Exerciser is made with new, live springy rubber so as to give it long wear and great resisting qualities. Sold with a guarantee of 50 rubber bands to each cable and to give entire satisfaction or money back. Free instructions. Made four ways. Send no money—Send the coupon.

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Please send your [ ] cable [Progressive Exerciser

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No craving for tobacco in any form after you begin taking Tobacco Redeemer. Don't try to quit the tobacco habit unaided. It's often a losing fight against heavy odds and may mean a serious shock to the nervous system. Let us help the tobacco habit to quit YOU. It will quit you, if you will just take Tobacco Redeemer according to directions. It is marvelously quick and thoroughly reliable.

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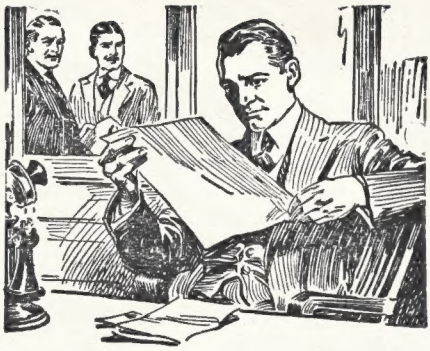

"I'm going to raise his salary"

"I've had my eye on him for some time and I know he can handle bigger work.

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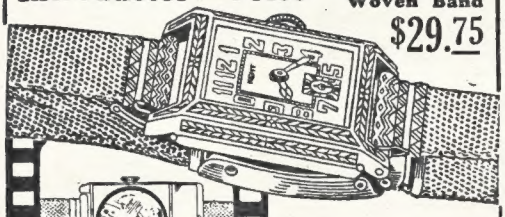
Here it is at last MEN

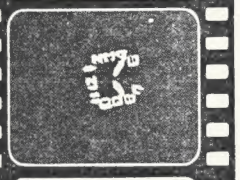
The KENT

Sent for $1 —Insured —Dust-proof —Jar-proof

Here's How You Get It—Send $1.00 with brief note telling us: (1) how long at address; (2) age; (3) married or single; (4) name and address of employer; (5) nature of work; (6) how long employed. All information held confidential—no direct inquiries to employer.
Upon arrival of your letter we will open a Ten Month Charge Account and send the Kent watch so that you can wear it for 15 days. If satisfied, pay $2.87 a month—otherwise return and your dollar will be refunded.
None sold to persons under 20 years of age.

Introductory Price—Complete with Woven Band $29.75





The Kent is a specially constructed watch that is dust-proof and jar-proof. With each purchase you receive an insurance policy which is your protection. Here are the features of its construction illustrated to the left:

1—A flexible dust-proof shield covers the movement which keeps out dust and dirt.

2—Radium numerals and hands enable you to tell time in the dark.

3—Case is specially constructed of three pieces with bezel beautifully engraved. This protects the movement from dust and dampness.

4—The movement is especially constructed to withstand jars and jolts. It has 15 Jewels, three adjustments and is fitted in a solid casement. Better buy it today while you have the advantage of our unusual introductory price.

L.W.SWEET Inc

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NEW YORK

To any adult interested in purchasing a diamond watch or other article of jewelry we will send free of charge and without obligations this booklet illustrated in colors—Masterpieces of the jeweler's art. 10 months to pay on everything.

MODERN JEWELRY AT A MODERATE PRICE

$1.00 brings your choice 10 months to pay

$52.50
21-Cupid engagement ring with motif of arrows, hearts and cupids; set with three blue white diamonds. $1.00 with order. $5.15 a month.

$65
22-Bird design engagement ring; 18K white gold; A A 1 blue white diamond. $1.00 with order, pay $4.00 to Postman; $6.00 a month.

WHAT YOU DO—
Send $1.00 with number of article desired, and brief note stating (1) how long at address, (2) age, (3) married or single, (4) name of employer, (5) nature of work, (6) how long in employ.
Information will be held strictly confidential — no direct inquiries sent to employer.

WHAT WE DO—
We will immediately open a 10 month Charge Account and send selection for approval and 15 days trial. If satisfied you pay balance in 10 equal monthly payments. Otherwise, return and your dollar will be refunded.

No articles sold to persons under 20 years of age.

$42.50
20-Love Knot; 18K white gold set with A A 1 blue white diamond. $1.00 with order. $4.15 a month.

$50
23-Roman scroll design; 18K white gold; large A A 1 blue white diamond. $1.00 with order. $4.90 a month.

$39.50
27-Two blue white diamonds; four blue sapphires, 15 Jewels; 14K solid white gold wrist watch. Complete with flexible bracelet set with two triangular cut blue sapphires

It's a Bulova
26-New Bulova watch 15 Jewels; dust-tite cap; radium numerals and hands. Nationally advertised cash price $29.75. $1.00 with order $2.87 a month.

Sent to any Adult interested in the purchase of diamonds, watches or jewelry. Ten months to pay on everything.

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25-Beautiful design, 18K white gold, three blue white diamonds; four blue sapphires. $1.00 with order. $4.15 a month.

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